SHORT STORIES.

THE DAINTY HOME FICTION PAPER.

No. 717.] Week ending September 27th, 1902. [One Penny.

She sprang forward, clothed in her bridal dress, yellow with age. "Twenty-five years ago you left me on my wedding-morn! But it was only a test of my love! I knew you would come back to me!"

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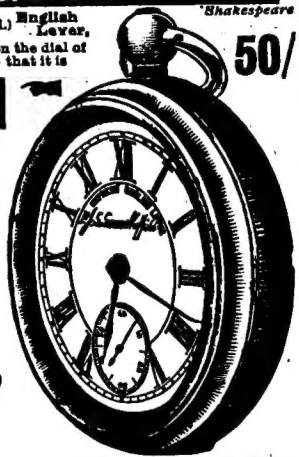

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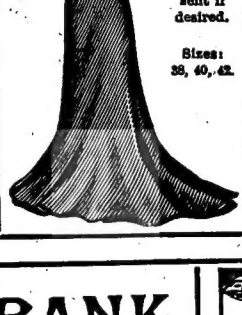

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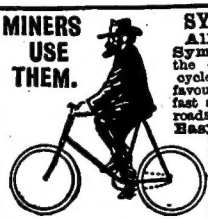

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SHORT STORIES

No. 717. ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending September 27th, 1902.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

A Powerful Story Telling of a Deserted Bride.

It had snowed for two days incessantly.

Grayson's eyes rested upon the scene thoughtfully. His hands were thrust deep into his pockets. Occasionally he shivered with the cold that crept in between the cracks of the ill-fitting window. The sensation of hunger gnawed at his stomach. The man had eaten nothing since the day before. Finally he laughed.

"I'm beaten, that's about the truth of it. I'm hungry and cold. I haven't a penny. I've pawned everything I possess, yet I am fortified against the world with a profession—a profession—Heavens! I'd sell all I know of it for one good, filling dinner."

It had been a hopeless, merciless struggle from the beginning, yet in those first months of misfortune Grayson had remained unbroken in courage. Even when his father had gone Grayson had risen stoically above his grief. Once, years before, Grayson had watched his father drag himself by the strength of stupendous will above a heart-breaking despair. It appeared unfair then that a beloved wife and mother had been taken away. She had been so dear to them both; so necessary to the very existence they led. Yet probably because of this one fact, from the moment of her death, father and son had become inseparable.

But now it was the ending of everything—all at a stroke. There was no longer any future, any hope, any fight, any chance at all. He was homeless, friendless, penniless and hungry—fearfully hungry.

About nine o'clock the man fumbled his way to the table in the centre of the room and lighted a gas jet overhead. Then he went to his cupboard, getting out the roll and the tea, handling both cautiously. He poured some water into a tin mug, put in the tea leaves, and stood on a chair to steep the mixture over the flickering light.

While the man was drinking his hot tea without sugar or milk, soaking the crusts of the one hard roll every now and then to make it more palatable, a rap sounded on his door.

"Come in," he cried, rising and looking expectantly at the door.

It was his landlady—shambling, ungainly, but very sympathetic.

"Doctor, it's a call for you, but I wouldn't advise you to take it."

Grayson listened with eager intentness. "A call, Mrs. McIntyre?"

"Yes, sir, but I wouldn't take it."

A sudden wave of relief smote the man. "That would not be professional; but why wouldn't you take it?" He could afford to be curious.

"Because it's from over there"—the woman jerked her thumb.

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For a moment, in spite of himself, a queer chill ran up Grayson's spine, settling itself somewhere in the base of his brain. She referred to the house of preposterous mystery.

"Over there?" he repeated slowly.

"Yes, sir; they're in a hurry, too."

"Say that I will come—at once."

Crossing the street was a struggle—literally a hand-to-hand battle with the storm. Once at the door of the house the man paused, exhausted and panting. He was weak from want of food and numbed from an all-day's chill. After a moment he straightened up and rang the bell.

The wire grated harshly. Somewhere in the distance, like a phantom sound, he heard the vibration of striking metal. When the door was opened Grayson faced a tall, lean, hard-mouthed woman. She barred the way.

"I am the doctor from across the street," he volunteered.

"What do you want?" she demanded.

"Someone came for me. I understand my services are needed here."

Grayson's elation was falling.

"Well, you can go back. We don't——"

Before the woman finished a scream rang through the house—a scream that rose above the cry of the wind and came to them a fearful, paralysing sound. In the stillness that followed, Grayson's jaded senses became alert. There was no longer any hesitation.

"I am needed here. Stand out of my way." He put his one empty hand on the woman's shoulder, making her stagger under the grip. Immediately he slipped into the hall, letting the door fly to with a jar that shook the house. Before the last echo died away a young girl came running towards him. She was pallid and trembling violently.

"Oh, thank Heaven, you are here," she cried, her words coming with dreadful rapidity. "I sent for you because something is the matter. I don't know what. I've only been here a few days, and she is always strange, but not like this. It is terrible to watch. She must have help. Please, please hurry!"

Meanwhile the woman, expressing no emotion of any sort, moved away. "You'll find out by to-morrow that it's all nonsense," she announced as she disappeared.

Silently the girl and he walked the length of the long hall.

"She's in here," she whispered, stopping before a door.

In spite of all he could do, Grayson was uneasy. Following the girl and moving noiselessly, he entered the room. For a moment the dimness prevented him from distinguishing objects clearly. But bit by bit it all lay before him. The richness of the furnishings and the decay everywhere so evident; the room was abominably dirty, heavy with grime and filth; the air reeked with the smells of age. Blackbeetles

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crawled lazily in and out of the crevices in the woodwork. Once a large rat scurried across the floor. At sight of it the man dodged back in horror. Over between two windows stood an immense desk made of black wood and inlaid with silver wire. Plunged on her knees before it, Grayson's eyes made out the figure of a woman, her body rocking to and fro with a persistent regularity.

Presently the distant figure arose and the man's eyes widened in astonishment. He saw that she was as white as the dead, with eyes that burnt deep in their sockets and a face from which all expression had fled. She was arrayed in wedding garments—garments as grisly as finery taken from the tomb.

Pushed back from the face, but falling over her head and to the bottom of the bridal dress yellow with years, hung the limp veil, ragged and frayed. Covering the emaciated hands were long gloves, rotted and torn. Her feet were hidden in tiny slippers, broken through where the satin had long since refused to hold together.

"Go to her," whispered the girl.

The man obeyed, wondering what he ought to do or say, willing to have given at that minute, years of professional life for a knowledge broad enough to encompass a case like this. He told himself that, perhaps, if the woman would come to him voluntarily, the skill of questioning her without arousing antagonism might arrive instinctively.

But the opportunity for those questions never came. Suddenly the woman raised her head. She met Grayson's eyes full upon her. For a moment she gazed spell-bound, then straight as a child who in trouble goes to the one it loves for help and comfort, this woman went to Grayson. There was no doubt, no uncertainty, hardly any surprise. It was as if she had looked for him daily all her life.

But the transition in her face was stupendous. All in a moment the lines of hardness and the scars of suffering were obliterated by a radiance of divine happiness. Silently, swiftly, but very surely, this woman came with a bound out from a dementia of hideous sorrow.

"I knew it! I knew it!" she gasped. "Charles, I was right. You meant it as a test to my love. It was not desertion. No, no, never that. I did not know what would become of me. Yet I never really doubted. Oh, it was not desertion! I loved you too much to believe such a thing. But sometimes I was afraid. It has been so long, so many, many years." She threw herself into the man's arms, caressing him, fondling his hands, talking all the while with pathetic rapidity. But while the doctor was all at sea, something told him that this was not the chatter of insanity.

Presently she held a letter out to him; a scrap of paper that had not left her hands. "When this came to me on our wedding day I was here, dressed like this—waiting for you. First I was frightened. I screamed. I remember that. Afterwards I seemed to wake from my fright. I knew it was not desertion. I tried to be brave and not to mind. I never once blamed you, for you could not know how you were to make me suffer. But my father would not understand. He was so angry I believed he would hunt you out and kill you. I forgot my own grief in talking—explaining to him. Finally I saw the tears in his eyes and I knew he was understanding at last.

"I have been faithful to the day. Every anniversary I have come to this room in my bridal clothes and waited from dawn till dark. I knew you would come if I waited long enough. Some of those days were hard, but I always trusted." She pointed to the letter again. "I always read this, too, on the anniversary, and though I never meant to, the scream would come just as it did on that day long ago."

The woman's body was shaking with excitement and the girl had crept up to her side, tears of pity brimming in her eyes. But Grayson was speechless. During that torrent of words some sixth sense was suddenly born in him—a sense warning him of what he might expect.

"Auntie," whispered the girl, touching the woman gently.

At once the bride turned. "Elizabeth, my dear, this is my *fiancé*. We were to have been married twenty-five years ago to-day. But he has only just come for me. This is Charles Grayson, Elizabeth." There was great pride in the quavering voice.

But at the mention of his name the man reeled, his senses stunned. What did it mean? Who was this woman? Who was that other, the man of his name, who had wronged her so cruelly?

The girl watched him curiously.

"It was an unkind letter, wasn't it, dear?"—she held up the paper. "I have just been reading it again."

The man clenched his fists. "Let me see it—again," he gasped.

She gave it to him, at the same time drawing herself from his arms. Grayson opened the paper, sick with dread. It began abruptly: "I am doing a dastardly thing, yet I should be more of a coward if I stayed. Do not judge me more harshly than you can help. I am to be married to-day to the woman whom for years I have loved. Loved madly, loved with all my soul. She is penniless—so am I—yet I have more courage in facing life with her whom I adore than in coming to you who would make my life easy with luxury. Am I not right in going before I commit a greater crime against you than I have already done

"Charles."

"Father! Father!" moaned the man. "How could you?" A spasm of pain ran through him. For a brief second his anger rose hot against his father. But the woman claimed him again instantly.

"Don't grieve," she began, her voice weak and trembling. The radiance, too, was leaving her face. "The sorrow is past."

"Yes," he groaned, "but does that make up for the suffering that has been?"

"You are so little changed," she said, finally, "and I am so different. But you will care for me just the same, dear, won't you? Just the same?"

He might have answered in a dozen different ways. What he said was, "My whole life shall be devoted to you, from now until—death."

"This is the wedding gift I spoke of. It is all my property willed unconditionally to you for life; afterwards it goes to your heirs. I hid it long ago to show my faith."

The last word faltered, for a great faintness was creeping over the woman. She could no longer stand unsupported by Grayson's arms. The twenty-five years of waiting had done their work.

From now on, she was a little light-headed, talking continually. Bit by bit the extent of the mental anguish she had endured came out. She never chided, never once complained; but the man was not deceived. All she asked now was his care and love and presence, and Grayson gave what he could—expiating his father's wrong.

He sat through the night holding the poor, thin hands in his, making his father's peace.

Towards morning everything became suddenly silent. The woman roused herself from a half stupor, murmuring, "I am very cold. Hold me closer, Charles." She had lost all idea of time, imagining herself a girl once more. After a little she spoke again:

"You are here, dearest? Really here, near me?"

For answer the man picked the fragile body up in his strong arms, holding her tight against his breast. With a contented sigh her eyes closed. Elizabeth, sitting apart, dozed from sheer weariness of watching. About three o'clock Grayson spoke across the room:

"She is unconscious. I do not believe your aunt will live long."

A little later she opened her eyes. They were bright with the clearness of renewed youth. She looked up into the man's face.

"My beloved——"

Grayson bent. He leant down and kissed her full on the lips. A thrill swept through her. A second later she sighed for the last time on earth, but the smile of divine happiness did not fade from her face.

G. P. Daniels.

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Won by a Tune.

"Good-bye, dearest!"

"Good-bye!"

For the twentieth time Mark Jermyn uttered the words of farewell, and for the twentieth time the girl responded, but, realising that the parting was not an ordinary one, they were loth to part even then. Years hence they might meet again; perhaps never!

"And dearest, you'll remember, if the recollection of me ever stands in your light, you're to forget I existed. Promise me that!"

The girl looked into the earnest face bending over her, into the depths of the grave, brown eyes.

"I cannot," she said softly. "Moreover, is it necessary? Is it what you would do were you in my place?"

Her logic was unanswerable, and he sighed.

"If you were the only child of somebody next door to a millionaire," she went on, "and your father forbade you to marry anyone who was not wealthy whilst you really loved one poor as a church mouse, would you give up without a struggle? Of course you wouldn't, Mark! You'd wait, and wait, and hope!"

"But waiting doesn't always bring wealth," broke in Jermyn, "especially in the musical profession. Why did my father ever destine me for his own career?" he added bitterly.

"Because it's what you're most fitted for," Elsie Renton replied. "Mark, dear, you're going to be a great man."

He waived away her words with a smile and another kiss.

"You flatter me, sweetheart" he said, "although it's true my father was far from being a mediocrity. He changed his name on marriage, and died when I was only five years old. But his existence really ended, so far as the world was concerned, when he forsook his old name, for he never composed a single thing after."

"How strange!" remarked the girl, wonderingly. "And what a terrible example to you, dearest."

He laughed.

"You may think so. Of course, I was too young to know much then, and never heard how it all happened, for my mother soon followed my father."

"And his name before, was——?"

"Wegar—Mark Wegar—one of the foremost composers of his time!"

* * * * *

A couple of years later, Mark Jermyn was in London. It seemed much longer since he had parted from Elsie Renton in Paris, where they had been fellow students at the Conservatoire; she for the sake of finishing a musical education, he because he had his future living to consider.

In Paris, the girl had been free from the hidebound conventionalities of home and her doting parents would doubtless have been horrified had they known she had dared to regard someone with affection. The two had parted; he, to work for a name, and she to enter Society.

And now he was in London, his fame having preceded him, and Mark Jermyn, the celebrated pianist was announced to make his *début* before the most critical audience in the world. Success had not spoilt him, and he remained the same modest man that had held Elsie's hand in his two years since; deeply, madly, in love with her still. Several times she had written to him, and with her last letter in his pocket as a talisman, he faced the eager crowd that evening.

The performance was a success, Mark Jermyn's reputation was more than upheld, and he quickly became the lion of the hour. Invitations from the highest in the land literally showered upon him, so numerous, that they would have taken years to respond to all, one of the earliest coming from the Renton's offering a princely fee for a short recital at a forthcoming "At Home" To this, Jermyn stiffly replied that he only accepted social engagements. An answer soon came altering the tone of the invitation, and a day or two later, he found himself about to meet his loved one once more.

The place was already thronged with guests when he arrived, but Elsie was the first to greet him, and as he took her hand he would have knelt down there and then and kissed it, had not decorum forbade. She welcomed him gaily, and he felt all at once the happiest of mortals, for a single look served to tell him he held her heart still.

"I'm hostess for the moment," she observed. "Let me take you to mother."

He followed her, and a little later was being introduced to Mrs. Renton.

"Mr. Jermyn, mother!"

The stately lady addressed, looked up, and as she saw his handsome, clear-cut features, started.

"Mr. Jermyn?—ah, yes, of course! Your appearance seems familiar. But then, aren't your photographs all over London?" she asked.

Mark bowed, but guessed by her tone that she had never seen his portrait.

Soon he became swallowed up in a crowd of people anxious to be introduced, but he detested the necessity of being polite; five minutes alone with Elsie was all that he craved for.

The millionaire's daughter, however, was now busily engaged in chatting with a cavalier who gazed upon her with unmistakable admiration, and the scene caused a pang in Mark's heart. Had he, after all, any semblance of a chance?

He sauntered aimlessly about, conversing first with one and another, till at length he found himself addressing the host himself. And Jermyn was agreeably surprised; Elsie's father was not nearly so formidable as he had pictured him to be; on the contrary, his attitude towards the young lion of the season was courtesy and geniality itself.

"Ah! my daughter tells me she met you in Paris," he remarked. "One of the first to discover your genius, I believe? Elsie's a dear girl, my dear sir!"

"She is," assented Mark, earnestly.

"Always a dutiful girl, and a prize worth the winning," continued Mr. Renton, briskly. "It's a pity we're to lose her so soon—but there! the men, the men! I was young myself once."

"You mean someone will fall in love with her?" queried Jermyn, anxiously.

"Has fallen in love. Scores of them. By the way, there she is with Lord Mapleson."

Mark Jermyn turned, and followed the other's glance to where Elsie stood talking with the man he had noticed a few moments before.

"Are they——?"

"Engaged, my dear sir, engaged. And to be married shortly. My wife's a wonderful woman, she's arranged it all!"

Mark's first impulse was to flee, but he resolved to learn the truth from Elsie's lips first. At last he caught her glance, following her into a small ante-room leading from one of the

principal apartments. When the door closed, he took her hand, and looked into her eyes.

"Elsie," he asked. "Is it true?"

She averted her gaze.

"Is what true?" she murmured.

"That you're engaged to Lord Mapleson?"

Her eyes filled with tears and she turned towards him passionately.

"No!" she said vehemently. "He's asked me frequently, but I've always refused. But mamma insists, and the rumour we're engaged is about already. Oh, Mark! Mark!"—with an outstretching of her arms that was irresistible; "what's to be done?"

He took her into his arms.

"You love me, what is to prevent our happiness?"

"Mother—she insists. Father, I know, would rather I married a man of my choice."

"And I insist on your marrying me!" he cried earnestly. "That is, if you're willing to become the wife of a nonentity?"

She looked up quickly.

"Who is the nonentity?" she asked. "You, the clever artiste or"—with a gesture of disdain—"Lord Mapleson?"

"Then, darling," he cried, "if your mother will not consent, it must be a runaway match. You're sure you don't mind intrusting your happiness to me?"

"No, indeed, Mark, no! I love you, oh! heaps more than I did two years ago, and that's something, isn't it?"

He admitted that it was, and kissed her, when someone calling Elsie, she had to leave. Mark strolled back to the drawing-room with a lighter heart. Someone was asking Mr. Renton whether Jermyn was to play; the host shrugged his shoulders, but the musician at once interrupted with the remark he should only be too delighted.

A move was made to the piano, whilst all voices were hushed as it became known that the great Jermyn was at the instrument. He ran through several of his better known things in succession, playing as he had never played before, his audience, spellbound and enraptured. The applause at his conclusion, unlike most drawing-room applause, was for once sincere.

Mr. Renton was profuse in his thanks, and then his less genial wife inquired as a special favour, whether he would give them a novelty.

"A novelty?" repeated Mark, anxious to please his prospective parent. "Ah, yes! I had almost forgotten. To-day's the twenty-second, isn't it? There is one thing I only play once a year, and always on the twenty-second of this month."

His hearers looked puzzled, but his fingers had already wandered over the keyboard and at first seemed to evolve nothing but chaos. But suddenly came forth the notes of a sweet love song, delicious, haunting and uncanny almost. And as the melody flowed on, full of pathos and quaint touches, like the outpourings of a lovesick heart, tears came unwillingly to the eyes of the fashionable listeners. Mark himself, seemed lost to his surroundings, for was not the piece his father's last composition, one that had been too sacred to give to the world?

The last notes of the song were gradually dying away, when all at once there was a tense scream from a distant corner of the room.

All turned and saw that Mrs. Renton had fainted!

A few days later, Mark Jermyn called to inquire after Mrs. Renton, whom it was understood was seriously ill. The young fellow was at once shown into Mr. Renton's study, where the millionaire greeted him cordially.

"My dear Mr. Jermyn," he said "you're the very man I wish to see! You remember the effect your wonderful playing produced on my wife the other evening?"

"Unfortunately," responded the famous musician. "Believe me, I'm exceedingly sorry."

"It's not your fault, my boy," he answered kindly. "The event has brought something to light which I hope may mean your happiness. I have learnt that my daughter loves you."

"Yes," responded Mark, quietly. "And I love her too."

"Just so, just so! What I was going to say was this; my wife, it appears, was once engaged to your father."

Mark Jermyn looked up in astonishment.

"Yes," continued Mr. Renton, "and, from what I can gather—of course, this is in confidence between you and me—she broke Mark Wegar's heart. My wife jilted him for myself, and it seems, that out of pity, he afterwards married his cousin whom he discovered had been in love with him for years. The air you played the other evening was one of Wegar's compositions, was it not?"

"Yes," replied Mark. "My father left me the MSS. with the injunction it was only to be played on the twenty-second of November every year—the anniversary of what, I could never make out."

"Ah! my wife recognised the theme; it was the old love song he used to play to her and of which she had been so fond. The date you mention was the one on which she broke off the engagement. Old memories came back to her, and—and—"

"Say no more, sir, it's a painful subject."

"To be sure, to be sure! My wife wishes me to tell you that although she broke your father's heart she has no wish to break either yours or her daughter's. We are both willing you should marry Elsie."

Someone opened the door just then, and Elsie Renton, seeing Mark, threw herself into his arms.

T. Bonsall.

Only Practising.

OLD LADY (on her way to church): "Don't you know, little boy, that it is very wicked to play cricket on Sunday?" Little Boy: "We ain't playing; we're only pracisin' for to-morrow's game."

How He was Stung.

"HENRY, you look worried; what's the trouble?" "I was stung to the quick by an adder this afternoon." "Heavens! How did it happen?" "Why, I went to the bank this afternoon, and the manager told me my account was overdrawn."

OCTOBER 7TH **OCTOBER 7TH**

IS THE DATE OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF

"A Foe in the Family."

"SHORT STORIES'" SPLENDID NEW SERIAL.

OCTOBER 7TH. **OCTOBER 7TH.**

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A Fatal Wooing.

The Tragic Story of a Woman's Love.

LADY SELBY'S picnic had been a great and glorious success. Everything had gone off well, from the champagne and lobster salads to the various little flirtations for which the kind-hearted hostess loved to make herself responsible. It is no easy task to entertain a large party of fashionable young men and women all day long, but Lady Selby's energy was inexhaustible. Her sole object was to make everybody happy, and, with one exception, she had succeeded even beyond her own expectations.

Her old friend, Major Bohmann, had been moping about in a state of abject misery ever since he had arrived. Lady Selby, being a woman with unlimited experience in such little difficulties, soon saw what the matter was, but for the life of her she could not remedy it. She did her utmost to throw Mrs. Corbolis in the Major's way, but that lady was far too much taken up with a young friend she had chosen out for herself to pay any attention to her hostess' gentle hints. And so the day had passed away.

It was evening now, and Lady Selby was rushing about here and there, and, with the help of three or four energetic young men, trying to whip in the various couples who had strolled away far into the forest glades, where the sinking sun was throwing long, wavering shadows on the green sward, and the cool, mossy banks tempted them to unburden the secrets of their hearts to one another.

At last they were all collected on the river banks, and there was more than one couple who thought the delightful wanderings through those woodland paths had come to an end all too soon.

Most of the party were going home by water. In the cool of that midsummer evening the gently rippling waves which lapped so musically against the boats, fastened by their painters to the overhanging willow trees, certainly looked more inviting than the dusty roads.

But someone must give up their place to drive home with Major Bohmann in the dog-cart. He looked imploringly at a little woman in black, who was just gathering up her skirts in the daintiest fashion to jump on board the tiny sailing yacht, her fingers lightly resting on the hand of a young man who stood in the bows with a happy smile upon his well-bronzed face.

All the afternoon the Major had been trying to get a word with her, ably seconded by his thoughtful hostess, but she had persistently and purposely evaded him. Something in his glance must at last have touched her, for, kissing her hand to the others, who had already taken their seats, she turned round, and in another moment was clambering up beside him.

The young man in the boat, whom the others familiarly called Jack, and whose name was Vaughan, threw himself down on his cushion with an angry, disappointed scowl, which deepened as his companions frivolously discussed the chances the widow had of "catching the Major again," and told one another stories about the previous adventures of the little lady, who seemed to fall in love with every other man she came across, and yet never by any chance to get further than the preliminary flirtation stage.

The Major had been her most intimate friend ever since her schoolroom days, and it was well known he had stood by and seen another claim her hand, which at that time he would have given his soul to possess. When she began to recover from her terrible grief, first at her husband's disappearance, and then at his reported death, the Major had come forward in his simple, honest, straightforward way, and once more renewed his attentions to her.

Led on by false hopes, he had proposed one day at the very house at which they were now staying, only to be laughingly refused. From that time forward the Major had been a confirmed woman-hater.

To his intimate friends he would confess that he would never trust a woman again, and to see two people flirting, as society people will flirt to amuse themselves, and to pass away the long days in a country house, would drive the honest Major almost frantic. His own bitter experience was still deeply impressed, or rather engraved, on his mind, for nothing could ever obliterate it.

It is just possible that if young Vaughan could have overheard the conversation between the two people in the dog-cart he would not have felt so miserably unhappy, but perhaps it was well that he did not.

For the first half mile neither of them spoke a word. The Major was looking straight away over his horse's ears; Mrs. Corbolis was snatching carelessly at the bunches of half-ripe nuts as the cart brushed by them in the narrow lane. The Major's eyebrows were working nervously up and down.

The truth was, he was very angry, and was trying to compose himself, which is no easy task for a middle-aged gentleman who has been inexpressibly worried and bored for ten whole hours at a stretch.

"Mrs. Corbolis," he said at last, speaking with a careless affectation, which he was very far from feeling, "I have been waiting for a quiet moment to speak to you all the day, and you have purposely avoided me. Not once, but time after time. How have I managed to offend you?"

"Perhaps I had someone I liked better to amuse me," said Mrs. Corbolis, keeping her eyes steadily fixed on a little foot encased in patent leather, which peeped out from beneath her black serge skirt.

"So it seems," said the Major drily.

Just the faintest tinge of pink coloured the widow's cheeks.

"And even so, what is that to you?"

The Major uttered an impatient exclamation.

"After all these years, Maria, I really think this affectation is rather out of place. I have been your friend," he went on bitterly, "for nearly forty years, and it is somewhat ridiculous to treat me as you are doing now."

"When I got up here to drive with you, I did so because I

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thought that you had something special you wanted to say. If I had known you were only going to speak nonsense, I should not have come."

Mrs. Corbolis spoke very slowly, and her tone was icy cold and forbidding in the extreme.

"And I *have* something special to say."

"Then, Major Bohmann, I think, under the circumstances, I should say it, and leave off flogging that poor horse like that. It's quite unnecessary. Besides, it's cruel."

There was nothing which annoyed the Major more than the treatment he was receiving, and the little widow was perfectly alive to the fact. The truth was, she was frightened by his serious manner, and hoped to exasperate him so that he would not take advantage of their *tête-à-tête*.

"I want," the Major began after a long silence, during which he had been trying to keep his temper. "I want to speak to you about my young friend Jack Vaughan."

Once more the colour rose to his companion's cheeks, but the Major did not notice it.

"Well?"

"I think, Maria," the Major went on with sudden vehemence, his irritability getting the better of his prudence, "that it is a disgrace, a shame—a wicked, cruel shame—to lead him on in the way you do. Do you think he is a cold, heartless being like yourself? If so, you are mistaken. You will break the boy's heart, as you have succeeded in breaking mine, and as you have already succeeded in breaking the hearts of a hundred other men besides.

"You forget, or else you purposely refuse to remember, the sacred nature of the fire you wantonly kindle; you forget that often and often it can never be quenched again. He is innocent of the ways of the world. He thinks you really love him. And when he finds, as others have found before him, that you are only playing with his affections, using them to while away your spare time, it will ruin his whole life.

"I love the boy far too well to see his future happiness blighted for your temporary amusement. If you must flirt, flirt with men of the world who are as heartless and frivolous as yourself, or at least can read your character, and do not tamper with——"

"Major Bohmann, how dare you insult me like this? I shall flirt with whom I like!"

Mrs. Corbolis had risen from her seat, and the Major, half frightened at his own vehemence, would not have been at all surprised if she had struck him, but she sank back again, her lips as white as death.

"Then, my dear lady," said the Major with forced calmness, "I shall take the precaution to warn my young friend what a hollow, heartless woman you are, before you have time to do any more mischief. I have watched you encouraging him.

"Yes, I have seen it all," and the Major's eyes gleamed angrily. "You, a widow of forty-three—yes, I do not mind saying it—the prettiest, the most charming, apparently the most unaffected woman I know, but still on the wrong side of forty, actually flirting all you know with a boy, who until to-day was not even twenty-one.

"A boy straight from the wilds of Australia, inexperienced, and knowing nothing of the rotten state of society, or the heartless women who adorn it, and who has already learnt to love you, to look up to you, to trust you mutely, believing every word you choose to whisper in his ear, totally unable to resist your cunning wiles, the wiles which you have twined around more men beforetime than you could remember if you would."

At that moment the house was reached. What Mrs. Corbolis would have said will never be known, but probably she would have said nothing. The Major, who believed he had only been doing his duty, although he had not done it in the quiet gentlemanly way he had been rehearsing to himself, offered Mrs. Corbolis his arm with a polite little bow, as they mounted the steps together, but she brushed past him and entered the house.

She crossed the passage, and flew straight up the broad, oaken staircase, and did not stop until she was safely in her own little room. Then she locked and double-locked the door, threw herself upon her bed in a paroxysm of grief, and raged and wept as if her heart would break. Poor little woman, she had found it hard to keep back that flood of tears so long!

She was angry, frightened, and tired; terribly tired. Angry with the Major for daring to speak to her as he had done, and angry with herself for having given him in years gone by ample excuse for the words he had uttered, and frightened more than she herself knew lest he should carry out his threat and turn the boy's heart against her, the only creature she had loved since her husband had deserted her more than twenty years before, deserted her on the birth of her first-born son, and carried the little baby away with him almost before she had pressed it to her lips.

The terrible quarrel which had brought this about does not concern us here, but it left poor Mrs. Corbolis deprived of husband and child at one cruel blow, with all her faith in man shattered. It made her look upon all men with suspicion, and treat them as she thought they would treat her. It made her cold and heartless and unfeeling.

Then she had met Jack Vaughan at Sir Robert Selby's house, and she had loved him. From the first moment that their eyes had met they had been drawn together by a strange fascination. The difference in their age was no barrier between the two. She loved the boy as she never thought she could love again, and her one fear had been that he could never return it.

When she at first listened to Major Bohmann's angry words they filled her with delight, and now—now—he would be warned that she did not care for him; would be told to keep away; would be taught to look upon her as a cold and heartless wretch, who used him merely as a thing to toy away her idle hours. The thought was almost distraction.

The Major was perfectly right when he had said that Jack did love the little widow. He did not know what it was which drew him towards her as irresistibly as a moth is drawn to a candle-flame, but he felt his whole life was wrapped up in hers. He felt as if he had met her in some previous existence, so well could he foresee what made her happy and also what displeased her.

Their tastes were exactly similar. What she liked he liked, what she hated he hated; it seemed as if Nature, in spite of the score of years between their ages, had ordained them for one another's company. When he had seen her go off with Major Bohmann that afternoon his heart had been filled with a sudden dread, and he made up his mind he would confess his love to her that night and have the warrant of his future sealed and signed.

Meanwhile, Major Bohmann did not feel at all comfortable. Somehow or other what he had meant to deliver as kind words of semi-paternal advice had been thrown like a shower of poisoned darts. The widow's manner had aggravated him, and ruffled his hasty temper.

He did not for one moment regret the course he had taken, but he wished he had ridden over it more lightly. He had been rude, unwarrantably rude, and even though he had been doing his duty, he was rightly indignant with himself for using the words he had used.

A FOE IN THE FAMILY,
"Short Stories" new serial, commences in two weeks time.

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He threw down his gloves on the hall table, and, changing his felt hat for a light shooting cap, he strolled down towards the river, trying to drown the unpleasant reminiscences of the past half-hour in the smoke of a very strong cigar. Tobacco was, as a rule, an unfailing tranquiliser with the Major, but to-night, somehow, it seemed to have lost its charm. At the landing-place he found the rest of the party had already arrived, and were unpacking their boats of the empty bottles and disgorged hampers.

He singled out Jack, who was standing disconsolately by himself, and looking as black as thunder. Linking his arm in the lad's, they strolled off towards the house.

Although the Major had never set eyes on the boy until a few weeks before, he had taken a violent fancy for him. There was something about his plain, straightforward, unaffected manner that went to the heart of the old soldier. The two strolled through the fields together, and a fine pair they made —the one smallish and decidedly stout, the other tall and slight, but both with backs as straight as an Indian's arrow.

The Major meant to give his friend a timely hint about Mrs. Corbolis, but, somehow or other, when it came to the point, his courage failed him. How was he to tell this boy that the woman he trusted in was false—that she whom he loved with his whole heart was merely trifling with him? He smoked one cigar through and lit another, but still the right words did not find their way to his lips. How he thanked the constellations in after years for this timely hesitation! As it was, Jack was the first to break the silence.

"Major Bohmann," he said, "when my father died ten years ago in the Australian bush he gave me a letter, in which he told me I should find written my real name and the true history of my family. This he made me solemnly swear I would never open, until I came of age. And yet another oath he made me take. It was that if my mother should still be alive at that time—my mother, whom he never forgave for some great injury even on his death-bed—I should never make myself known to her.

"To-day, Major, is my birthday. I may open that letter I have guarded all these years, and now when the time has come I am afraid. I have felt so long that I must not break that seal, that now I dare not do it."

The Major pressed the lad's arm kindly. "Tell me," he said, "of what you are afraid."

"I cannot," answered Jack. "All I know is that I have a presentiment that evil will follow, and that the contents of this letter will bring me no happiness. Why should I want to know the past? What should I gain by knowing a woman as my mother who may never give me a mother's love? Think how terrible it would be if I ever were to meet her. To know that she was my mother, and yet never to say so, never to tell her of our relationship. Oh, it would be terrible!"

They had reached a stile which led into the park. Jack Vaughan clambered on it, and sat there dolefully, while the Major, very uneasy at the turn affairs had taken, and very much dreading a scene, said what he could to laugh the matter over. He stood there with his elbows resting on the stile, and keeping his eyes fixed on the herd of dappled deer which was browsing on the lower branches of the trees.

It was a pretty scene. The old park, with its long vistas of trees leading up to the old house in the distance, with its many waterfalls running between endless beds of flowers and its sloping banks of well-kept lawn. But neither of the men was admiring the beauties of nature just then. Presently the younger drew from his pocket an envelope, which, perhaps, once had been white, but now was almost black with the wear of many years.

"It's rather dirty," he said, with a little laugh, as he weighed it in his hands as he had done a thousand times before. "It has never been out of my pocket since my father—since it was given to me. I shall be quite sorry to lose its company. Will you open it?" he went on suddenly, swinging round and facing his companion. "Will you open it and tell me what I dare not read myself?"

The Major winced inwardly. He barred this sort of thing altogether. However, he took from his pocket a neat little ivory knife, and slid it along the top with a great deal of unnecessary precision. He opened the mysterious package and drew out a letter, and within its folds a photograph. "Here," he said, "'pon my word, you'd better read it. It might be private."

"No, you read it, please!" said young Vaughan eagerly.

The Major undid the letter. As he did so the photograph fell to the ground. He stooped to pick it up, and then started back with a little cry.

From his waistcoat pocket came a little bit of tissue paper with which he brightened up his glasses. Then he put them on and looked again.

"Well," he said slowly, "of all the curious coincidences—of all the—well, look at it yourself. Take it, man—take it. Do you know that face?"

Jack took the photograph eagerly.

"What, do you know her?" he asked.

Then he looked at the photograph. Not a word did he say. He turned a deadly white, and his face fell on his hands with a little sob.

The picture was one they both knew well. It was the picture of one they both had uppermost in their hearts just then. Presently he raised his head and looked into the Major's grey, compassionate eyes, which were bent upon him.

"It's awful!" he said, and then covered his face again.

"Then Mrs. Corbolis is your—your mother." The Major got the words out very slowly, as if half fearing that he had lost his senses.

It was all clear now. It was clear why Jack had so loved the widow. His strange infatuation was no longer a mystery to the Major. He saw it all.

How long the two men stopped there they neither of them knew. It was dark when Jack slid off the stile and said, "Come along."

"What are you going to do?" asked the Major, as they neared the house.

"I shall go away to-night," said Jack, looking up with tears in his eyes. "I cannot see her again. It would kill me!"

For the time the Major did not speak. He felt it was his duty to advise the young man as to the course he should take, but for the life of him he could not think what had best be done.

Such a problem had never been faced by man before.

"I don't think I should do anything rash like that," he said at last. "Why not go on as you are now? You love her with all your heart and soul, and so you ought to love your mother. Your love need not alter because its nature must. If you may never tell of your relationship, upon my word, I don't see that it matters much. I don't really. It would break your heart to go away now," the Major was just going to add, "although I don't say that it would break hers," but he stopped himself in time. It was useless to say anything of the matter which had been uppermost in his mind all day after the extraordinary turn affairs had taken.

At this moment they reached the house. Everyone had gone to bed. They let themselves in quietly through the conservatory, and in the hall they said good-night.

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"I think you are right," Jack said, as the Major pressed his hand and handed him the letter which could tell him nothing more he wanted to know now. "I will stop near her and love her still!"

Poor fellow, it was hardly surprising that he did not get any sleep that night. Surely no man ever before had fallen in love with his own mother, only to find out the relationship on the very night he had determined to offer her his hand in marriage, and then be bound by a promise he dare not violate not to tell her what they really were to one another.

* * * * *

Nearly three years had passed since that memorable day on which Mrs. Selby had given her picnic, and those three years had brought little change to the principal actors in this romantic drama.

It was one morning in May that Jack found a letter on his breakfast table at his London rooms inviting him to go down and spend a week or two with Major Bohmann at his house in Bournemouth. He was delighted at the prospect of seeing his old friend again, the one human soul who shared his secret and felt for him in his trouble.

Only one thing worried him. Since he had found her he had never let a day pass without calling on his mother. He had purposely taken rooms near the house in Kensington where she and her younger sister lived. He had devoted his time to making the widow's life a happy one. Every evening he would call in and see her, would sit and read to her, and confide in her his troubles and his griefs, all except the great one she could never share.

And he did not like to leave her even for a little time. He wondered what she would say when she heard he was going. Their strange, lop-sided affection had ripened exceedingly of late. Ripened, though, as it were on different stalks. How dangerous this affection was neither of them guessed. But, oh! the pity of it, that he had not followed his own impulse and gone away from her for ever that night when he talked with the Major in the park!

He went to his mother's house with the letter in his hands and a little bunch of rosebuds, which he never failed to take. He told her he was going away for a short time, and she looked at him sadly out of those great eyes of hers. But she made no protest. How could she? What could she have said to bind him to her side? It was a sad parting, but at last it was over. They were very dear to one another.

It was down at the seaside that Jack fell in love with a certain blue-eyed, golden-haired girl whom the Major had introduced to him. Those days spent down there were a new experience to him. All the pretty girls he had met at Lady Selby's had been as nothing beside the widow he loved so sweetly, but now he could love her and another too.

That last evening when he strolled along the cliffs with Margaret Fanshaw on his arm, with the indescribable, invigorating odour of the sea filling his lungs, was like the essence of a new life. As he stood and watched the great waves dashing against the rocks below, and dreamt of future happiness, he was more full of bliss than ever before in his life.

For had he not told her of his love and pleaded for hers in return, and had not the girl laid her hand in his in mute answer to his appeal? Oh, that fatal love! How shall I tell the end?

Jack Vaughan came back to London a changed man; a new-born spirit had taken hold of him.

And even while he had grieved at parting with his new love he had not forgotten his old. He longed to be back at his mother's side. He went straight there from the station and told her of his visit. He told her all he had done, all he had seen, everything up to a certain point, and then he could go no further. And that point was where Margaret Fanshaw appeared upon the scene.

He could not pluck up courage to tell her that she had a rival in his affections. He knew he ought to; but he went on as he had gone on before and he loved her too well to make her sad with the news of his betrothal; at least, he could not do it yet. Some day he knew it must all come out, and what would happen then he dared not think.

It was at Nice the next winter that the climax came. Lady Selby, Major Bohmann, his niece Margaret Fanshaw, and Jack Vaughan, all were there.

Jack had been out riding with the Major. They came back to the hotel, and on the steps stood Mrs. Corbolis. Why she had come out so suddenly, so unexpectedly, she told no one. One quick, searching glance at the lad's face and the secret was out. When his yes met hers he could have killed himself for not having told her of his love before. It was too late now. The opportunity had gone.

What would she think of him? He dared not even wonder. He was as one in a dream. How he went through dinner that night he never knew. Only one thing was clear in his mind—Margaret had promised to marry him next week, and his mother would be there to see the ceremony. He had hoped to get it all over before he told her. But now——

That night he invited Mrs. Corbolis to go out with him in the garden.

For half an hour they sat there silently on the terrace overlooking the sparkling waters of the Mediterranean.

"Why," she said at last, speaking, oh, so coldly and collectively, "why did you not tell me of your love before? How dared you treat me as you have done—to sit at my feet and whisper words of love into my ears, when all the time you were loving another—I who have waited these long years until you should care to make a home for me?

"Oh! it is cruel. It is more than I can bear. You, the one fellow-creature I believed in, the one fellow-creature I could trust, you have treated me worse than any other man has treated me before. Yes, worse than the cruel deserter who robbed me of the child I have never known. Oh! it will break my heart, it will break——"

"Mother!" The word was on his lips, but he could not utter it. He tried three times, but each time the enemy of his oath haunted him, and the word died on his lips. That one word alone would explain his conduct, could heal the terrible wound he knew he was inflicting, and that he dared not mention. His head sank to his knees for a moment, and then he dropped senseless at the widow's feet.

Poor creature, great as was his grief, hers was even greater. After those years of love it was more than she could bear to find, as it seemed to her, that the one soul who had really cared for her was only trifling all the time.

The poor woman could not have had a more cruel punishment for her frivolity in those years before she came across her son.

She roused herself at last. She called Jack by his name, but no answer came. She cast one long look at him, a look in which all her love had been transformed into a hate such as the face of woman seldom bears, and then she went.

* * * * * * *

Next morning she had disappeared. No one knew where. All she had left was a little parcel for Jack Vaughan. With it was a letter.

He tore it open. It read: "I am going for ever now, and I forgive you. This bottle of wine is old Madeira, my favourite, as you know. From this drink my health on you wedding day, drink it with your bride, and as you do so, have a kind thought for one poor sinner who died with your name on her lips."

* * * * * * *

Two years afterwards the marriage took place between Jack and Margaret Fanshaw. The former had aged greatly since his mother's death. His grief had been beyond description, for was he not her murderer? When the wedding breakfast was finished, he opened, with tears in his eyes, the bottle which she had left him.

He poured out two glasses, one for his bride and the other for himself. He had told her his strange story now that Mrs. Corbolis was dead. It was a moment full of sad memories, and he cared not if people saw the tears trickle down his cheeks.

There was a great lump in his throat as he raised the glass and said the simple word "Mother."

That wine had been drugged with the most deadly poison the hate of woman could devise.

C. K. Robson.

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The Palmist's Prophecy.

Its Utterances—Its Motives—Its Fulfilment.

CHAPTER I.

The Line of Life.

"And you say that this will certainly take place in three months from now?"

"Sir Howard Wynne will die, as I have said, at noon, on the seventeenth day of July next."

"And this, although his health is not now, apparently, threatened in any way?"

"Yes, in spite of his present good health."

"When was he here?"

"Why do you ask? *You* know, no one better."

"I?"

"Yes, you! He was not out of your sight from the time he drove from Brook Street, at eleven o'clock this morning, till he left here at a few minutes to twelve."

Madame Cecille, palmist, thought-reader, and "Society" second-sight juggler, looked keenly into the small, closely-set eyes of her visitor.

Accustomed as she was to the arriving at the inner thoughts and intents of men, by, and through a cunningly clever interpretation of individual facial expression, she was fain to confess that the features of Martin Trevenna, bronzed by the heat and glare of ten years of Indian suns, offered but little ground for coming to a right conclusion with regard to their owner's reliability or otherwise of disposition.

An ex-officer of a native regiment, he seemed to have imbibed by virtue of professional contact with his men, some of the more undesirable phases of the native character. Dissimulation, an unreasonable, because unnecessary reserve, together with a strange inability to discriminate between right and wrong (his own actions considered) made it difficult for even a clever character like our palmist to get at the heart and soul of the man, and to read his life-book.

It was at his suggestion that his cousin, Howard Wynne, had visited the Sloane Street Sybil, a suggestion having for its object his relative's moral bewilderment and intimidation.

Howard Wynne was not only the possessor of the family title and estates, he was also, as Martin Trevenna well knew, first in the affections of Mollie Doyle, the girl who, of all the world, had it in her power to hold him, Martin Trevenna, in the hollow of her hand, and to bind him as a slave to the chariot wheels of her sovereign will and pleasure.

Wynne was, by the accident of just half-an-hour only, the younger man, and indisposed by sheer laziness of nature to kick against any semi-assumption of superiority on the part of the other, as toward himself. So it was, therefore, that the somewhat weak-minded, but altogether single-hearted young baronet fell, all unsuspiciously, into as cleverly a devised trap as could well have been set.

The owner of Llanwrist Castle, County Carmarthen, Howard Wynne had, for the first sixteen years of his life, been brought up in close companionship with his cousin, Martin Trevenna.

The latter's mother, a Wynne, had married, in absolute opposition to the wishes of her family, a Cornish mine captain, one Martin Trevenna; a man rugged-natured, and blunt of speech and manner, but as professionally expert and enthusiastic, and as honest of soul, as any in all the "West Countree."

Killed, five years before, by the falling-in of the great Tremallick Mine, that stretched for nearly a mile under the sea, his son and namesake was indebted to Howard Wynne's father for a home, education, and an entrance into life as a subaltern in the native Indian army. Young Martin had, in fact, been born at Llanwrist, during one of his mother's rare visits to her old home.

He had from boyhood been envious of his cousin's position and prospects, and when a year prior to this present relation, he heard at Simla of his uncle's death, and of Howard Wynne's succession, he then and there devised a plan and course of action, the one end and aim of which was the ultimate securing for himself of his cousin's heritage.

Losing no time, and having a few thousands in reserve (thanks to his uncle's testamentary bounty), he forthwith sent in his resignation, took passage for England, and, at the time of his interview with Madame Cecille, was the undoubted master spirit in his daily and hourly intercourse with Sir Howard.

His acquaintance with the palmist was by no means recent, he having met her a year or so previously at the court of a native prince, who, attracted by her dealings in the occult, had invited her to take up her temporary residence in his capital.

Casting about, therefore, for an unscrupulous ally in his scheme for his cousin's undoing, he remembered the pretty French adventuress, and while not committing himself to the extent of dangerous personal compromise, he contrived to so far gain her adherence as that she should sow the seed of vague alarm in the mind of the young baronet—for a consideration.

"Remember!" she said, on his leaving the Sloane Street flat. "I am not responsible—I know nothing!"

It was a curious coincidence that, while standing at the kerb-side awaiting a hansom, the very woman with thoughts of whom his soul, or what passed for it, was at that moment full, should signal him from a passing brougham.

"Martin!" she cried as the carriage drew up, and she extended her hand to him. "I thought you were in Cornwall! Howard said something about your intention to see if something could not be done with the re-opening of that dreadful mine."

"Yes, it is quite true, Mollie, I *am* going to see about it, but not till next week. I leave for Tremallick on Sunday night. But when did you come to town?"

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"Yesterday. I saw Howard half-an-hour ago in the Park, and I am glad I have met you, for I want you to tell me what is the matter with him."

"The matter with him? Nothing that I am aware of. But why do you ask? What have you noticed wrong about him?"

"He would hardly speak," said the young girl, with an anxious look into Martin Trevenna's expressionless eyes, "and I am sure he is either ill, or worrying about something, for he was white and set, and—and—surely, Martin, he has no secret from you, who are so constantly with him—who are like his brother!"

"I can assure you, Mollie, that I am as ignorant of that which you imagine ails him, as you are yourself. More, when I last saw him this morning at breakfast, he seemed to me to be unusually jolly, and full of almost boyish good-humour."

Molle Doyle, unsophisticated, innocent as are the majority of country-bred girls, could not be expected to successfully measure swords with so accomplished a master of fence as the ex-lieutenant of Native Light Infantry. Yet she was not convinced at his off-hand disclaimer, though quite believing in him as a good friend to his cousin.

You cannot deceive the average woman, even if you do not actually declare your love for her. She knows of its existence by subtle intuition, and discourages or encourages you according to circumstances, and as she herself feels towards you.

Lady Mollie Doyle loved Howard Wynne, not because he had asked her for her heart, but because she couldn't help it. On the other hand, she knew of Martin Trevenna's overmastering passion, though as yet expressed by dumb signs of admiration only, but having but one heart for disposal, and as that heart could never in any case have gone a-wandering in Martin's direction, the knowledge she had gained only served to intensify all the womanly courtesy and tenderness of her nature as towards the man who had dared to stake his happiness upon her smile.

"Well, Martin," she said at parting, and regarding him steadfastly. "I shall never rest until I have found out what is the matter with Howard. You may not, as you say, know the cause, but something tells me that the truth lies with you, and with you alone, and that it is to you, and to none other, that I must look for the real explanation of the mystery."

CHAPTER II.

A Missing Letter and a Secret.

"Has Sir Howard returned yet from London, Edwards?"

"No, my lady!" replied the Llanwrist station-master, "but I did hear that he might be expected by the late express that always stops here for him."

"Which it certainly will not do to-night, Edwards!" said a man's quiet voice.

"Howard!" exclaimed Lady Mollie, turning sharply round and facing a tall, kindly-eyed young fellow in grey-tweed shooting suit and gaiters. "I am so glad you have come, for I want to see you awfully."

"Do you?" he said, looking wistfully down at her. "You must lose no time, then, dear, for I leave again for Milford Haven in less than four hours from now."

They had by this reached Mollie's dainty little pony-carriage in the station-yard.

"Milford Haven, Howard? Are you going across to Kingstown?"

"No, dear, I am to meet Martin at Milford, where my yacht is, and we are to make for Portreath, on the North Cornish coast. But if you will drive me to the Castle I will give you details on the journey."

"Well?" she asked as soon as they were on the open road. "What takes you to Cornwall, Howard?—and with Martin! I can't exactly explain, perhaps, what I mean, but I don't want you to go."

"Not go, Mollie, why?"

"That is what I cannot tell you, because I don't know; but for all that, dear, I shall be very—very unhappy if you do go this trip with Martin."

"Haven't you any reason for feeling like this?"

"Only a dream, Howard! A silly dream, very likely, you will say, and yet you know that I am not superstitious—not even a little bit."

"Well, I won't ask you for the details of your vision, Mollie, if that is all the reason you can give me for your not wishing me to go to Cornwall. But supposing that I have a strong, a very strong reason for going—how then? Although, curiously enough, there is a decidedly superstitious flavour about my reason too."

"Tell me," was all she said.

"Nearly three months ago I went—for the want, I suppose, of something better to do—to that palmist woman in Sloane Street, London—Madame Cecille."

"Whatever for, Howard?"

"I am sure I couldn't tell you. But, never mind that, I did go; and I'm ashamed to say that I haven't had an easy five minutes since."

"Why?"

"Well, you will hardly believe it, perhaps, but she prophesied, after pretending to read my hand (for it's all humbug and pretence, you know) that I should assuredly die at or about noon on the seventeenth of this month—two days hence."

"The wicked woman!"

"Say rather, dear, foolish me for listening and paying serious attention to such arrant rubbish."

"Of course you deserve a scolding, but you haven't shown me yet the connection between the prophecy and this yachting cruise."

"That is where my shame comes in. I am going just because I am afraid to face possibilities among those who know me."

"And Martin?"

"Oh! Martin is doing his best to help me to throw off this wretched something, which, after all, may and no doubt will prove to be nothing."

"Then why go?"

"Don't seek to dissuade me, dear. It is all very childish, I know; but I promise you, that next week, when I return to Llanwrist, you shall punish me in your own way. Will that content you?"

"I suppose it must. But here we are at the lodge. I shall not see you again before you leave. Good-bye, Howard!"

He bent over and kissed her.

"Good-bye, dear!"

Another minute, and the little carriage had disappeared round the bend of the road.

* * * * * *

Mollie was penitently reading a brief note from Howard Wynne, just delivered at Eloyne Court by the butler from Llanwrist.

There was not much in it, only a few words of regret that he was resistlessly impelled to go his own way in this matter, with an earnest expression of belief that in some, as yet unaccountable way, good would come out of evil.

The letter arrived immediatelyly after breakfast, and she had scarcely read it for the third time, when a mounted messenger from the housekeeper at the Castle, begged for her presence there without delay.

Not staying to even tell anybody of her intended absence, she ordered her ponies, and within the half hour was sitting in the housekeeper's room at Llanwrist.

"It is old Nurse Wyatt, Lady Mollie," said the stately domestic head of Howard Wynne's establishment.

"Sir Howard's old nurse, do you mean, Mrs. Evans?"

"Yes, my lady! And she wants to see you as soon as you can go to her."

"Wants to see me? Why, I don't know her!"

"Well, my lady, she sent word, an hour or more ago, that being as she was suddenly struck for death, she had something of the greatest importance to tell Sir Howard if he would go to her at once."

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"But Sir Howard is not here!"

"No, my lady, and so I told the boy that brought the message. Back he comes, however, almost directly, with the old woman's request that you would go. I didn't know what else to do, and though I thought it a liberty of her to ask it, sent on to you."

"You did quite right, Mrs. Evans. See that my ponies are put up for an hour, please, and I will walk across the park to the north lodge."

* * * * *

In the little room under the eaves old Rhoda Wyatt lay a-dying, while, sitting by the bedside, Lady Mollie heard from the dry, trembling lips, the most astounding story to which, during her short life, she had ever been fated to listen.

In effect it was this:

On the night of young Martin Trevenna's birth, twenty-nine years before, at Llanwrist Castle, she, Rhoda Wyatt, was in charge of the nursing arrangements connected alike with the advent of the Wynne heir, and with the coming of the little, poor relation.

Mrs. Trevenna, as Miss Wynne, had known the nurse from her own childhood almost, and when she saw that her new-born looked weakly, and needed better nurture than she, as a mere mine-captain's wife, could hope to give it, she tempted Rhoda to exchange the children, in order that she might secure for her own the advantages of a son of the house.

Rhoda Wyatt's task was made easier, in that the same night the suggestion was made, Lady Wynne died, so that no mother's unerring instinct was there to proclaim the substituted babe as an impostor.

Satisfied now that her son would, as the reputed heir, have his chances for life increased a hundredfold, and trusting to the chapter of accidents that in some mysterious fashion the wrong would, in the future, right itself, so that no one should suffer by her practically criminal action, Mrs. Trevenna wrote and gave into Rhoda Wyatt's keeping a short, signed statement of that which she had done, which, in the event of her own death, she enjoined upon the nurse to communicate to her own boy without delay.

Mrs. Trevenna died just before young Howard's twenty-first birthday, by which time Rhoda Wyatt had lost the letter. Fearing to make so momentous a statement on her own bare word, and fearing also the consequences of her own share in the matter, she decided to hold her tongue, and let things remain as they were.

It was only now, when death stared her in the face, that she felt she must unburden her mind, and disclose the secret, which, if her story was believed, would change the whole course of two men's lives.

Howard Wynne (so-called) not being at hand to receive the confession, who so fit as the girl of his choice to take it, and to pass it on to one or both of the victims of Mrs. Trevenna's indefensible duplicity and wrong-doing.

It would be difficult to describe Lady Mollie's feelings upon the conclusion of the old woman's narrative. Sorrow for her lover's blighted hopes and prospects, for his sure disappointment, his almost certain social ignominy and shame, filled her heart to breaking-point. But in the presence of the mighty leveller, she could utter no reproach, no condemnation; and so she watched life's light flicker out, closing gently the eyes of her whose tardy revelation consigned the man she loved to a future for which alike by nature and by up-bringing, he was ill-fitted and ill-prepared.

"Remember," she said; "I am not responsible—I know nothing."

CHAPTER III.

The Old Mine Workings Under the Sea.

During the run across the Bristol Channel, from Milford Haven to Portreath, Martin Trevenna played the game in such fashion, that his cousin, had he been even in the least suspicious, would have been disarmed and at ease.

It was late on the night of the sixteenth of July that the *Ariel* arrived off Portreath; so late indeed, that after consultation with his skipper, the baronet decided to stand "off and on" outside till the morning.

For some reason this did not appear to fall in with Trevenna's plans, for pleading an appointment with the resident representative of the Tremallick mine, he availed himself of an opportunity for going ashore offered him by the master of an in-bound fishing-smack.

Thoughwondering a little at the other's somewhat feverish haste to land, Howard, it being none of his business, made no remark beyond promising to meet his cousin at nine the next morning at the house of Micah Trevithick, the captain of the mine.

Though as a property of but small value nowadays, the Tremallick, in the opinion of many, only needed money to be spent upon it, to come out a paying concern.

Martin Trevenna's father had possessed a small share in the proprietary, and this having, after his death, devolved upon his son, who, owing to various causes, was now the sole remaining proprietor, Martin had for some time past been seeking capital in order to carry out his ideas of resuscitation.

This being so, his present visit to the mine, with his cousin for companion, was no surprise to anybody, and it was only in the light of after events, that his real motive was disclosed.

As has been said, the mine was situated close to the sea, running under it in fact, at right angles to the coast line almost, for a distance of nearly a mile.

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When Martin's father met his doom, it was in a desperate endeavour to penetrate the extreme limit of the subterranean workings—the mass of earth, rock, and ore forming the crown of the gallery, which then fell in, walling in the unfortunate man, as in a huge tank, under the ocean bed, which must have immediately filled with sea-water, and at once drowned the explorer.

The present captain's residence was a small hut (it was nothing better) at the shaft mouth. Here Martin Trevenna sought him just before midnight.

The grizzled old Cornishman's reception of his employer was not particularly cordial, or even commonly respectful.

"Look here, Mr. Trevenna, I've done your bidding, but to my mind it seems all wrong and dangerous, the knocking away of those props mid-way in the under-sea working. Mark my words, sir, the crown of the gallery won't stand many hours, and when it does cave in the whole mine will be flooded to sea level, and Tremallick will never give another ounce of copper so long as the world lasts!"

"Pooh, nonsense, man! So long as there is no movement or hammering down there, the place is safe enough. Besides the iron supports to replace the old wood props are on their way from Cardiff, and then you'll have no reason for croaking."

"All right, sir, the responsibility's yours, not mine; only don't ask *me* to go down again, for I won't! I'll live the rest of my life out natural, if I can."

"Oh, I shall not ask you to risk your skin, but to show you that I have the courage of my opinions, I mean to descend now, and have a look round before taking my cousin, Sir Howard Wynne, down in the afternoon."

"Very well, sir, I won't seek to persuade you to 'keep on the grass.' You know your own business best, I suppose."

"Now you're sensible, Trevithick. Get me a hat and candle, and a suit of overalls, and get yourself ready to go to St. Ives when I come up again. I have a letter and message to send there."

"Right, sir. I'll be ready."

The old man came to the door of the hut and watched Martin Trevenna, the lighted candle flickering in the front band of his old grey slouch hat, disappear from view over the shaft mouth, down the first of a series of ladders placed perpendicularly against the sides of the opening.

* * * * *

It was not Trevenna's first descent by many down the old mine shaft, and he faced the down journey of over five hundred feet without a tremor.

In places the rungs of the ladders were slippery, and in some instances perilously loose and insecure, but with care and prudent deliberation he managed to reach the bottom in safety.

By this time the candle was more than half burnt out, but as he had a supply in his pocket that did not trouble him much.

The limited light almost necessitated the blind man's resource, a feeling with the hands for the gallery opening under the sea.

At last he found it.

Above him, fully a hundred and twenty feet over his head, rumbled, with a sound like to distant thunder, the watery uneasiness of the mighty Atlantic.

Evidently a storm was in progress (it had threatened a gale before he left the *Ariel*) for to his imagination it seemed that mountain dashed against mountain, as if all the artillery of the world was roaring and booming up beyond the bed of ocean.

Still he crept on, intent upon one thing, the satisfying himself that his instructions had been carried out by old Trevithick.

Stumbling over a baulk of timber he recognised that he had reached his journey's end.

Only one prop remained, hardly sufficient, as the old captain had said, to keep danger off for more than a few hours at most.

"It will last till I get him down here, and then, for the upper air!—and love!—and—What's that?"

He stood a minute and listened intently. Again through the booming of the surge above sounded distinctly a sharp, quick, crack. He listened again, his heart stopping its beating almost, so deep was the mysterious suspense.

Then a louder, longer report, resembling a volley of musketry.

"My God! It can't be!" he half whispered to himself in terror.

Throwing all schemes and plans to the winds he turned swiftly to make for the gallery opening again, and for the bottom of the shaft. But the horror of his situation must have bewildered him, for instead of a free passage, he collided blindly with the gallery wall, his candle going out in the frenzied struggle to pull himself together.

Then out of the black, solid darkness rang a cry, which, if it could have been heard in the upper world, would have frozen the blood in the veins of the very vilest of humankind, so full of agonised and death-dreading despair was it.

Simultaneously with it the whole crown of the gallery at that point seemed suddenly to collapse, and with the triumphant roar, as of the final consummation of all things, the sea swept the tunnel from end to end, and—all was chaos.

* * * * *

It was ten o'clock when Howard Wynne knocked at old Trevithick's door; but to no purpose, for it remained fast shut.

"Twelve," sounded from Portreath Church-tower before the young man saw Trevithick returning along the road from the town.

Mutual explanations resulted in an adjournment to the shaft mouth.

Hastily throwing himself face downwards upon the ground, the old "captain" leant over and listened, making a motion with one hand to his companion for silence.

Even Howard Wynne could detect a faint swishing sound of water in motion.

When in a moment or two Trevithick rose to his feet, it was with a blanched face and trembling limbs.

"Sir," he said, with an awe-stricken catch in his voice, "the end of Tremallick has come, and Mr. Trevenna, God rest his soul!—has seen it!"

"You mean——!"

"That the sea has broken in, as I told him it would, and the son has gone to find his father."

* * * * *

The collapse of the Tremallick mine is talked of to this day on the north coast of Cornwall, but the contemplated crime of Martin Trevenna is hidden in his grave. If old Trevithick suspected anything he died a year or two after the catastrophe without word or sign.

* * * * *

Upon the *Ariel's* return to Milford Haven, the first to come on board were Lord Eloyne and his daughter, Lady Mollie Doyle.

That which they had to tell Howard Wynne, that he had no right to the name, but that as his dead cousin's next-of-kin, he was now the true and lawful owner of the Wynne title and estates, had, after his joy in the sure and certain possession of Mollie's love, one dominant meaning, namely, that palmists may sometimes arrive at, and prophecy the truth, seeing that on the day and hour indicated by Madame Cecille, Martin Trevenna, otherwise Martin Wynne, tenth baronet, duly met his death.

Ralph Enderby.

Poor Poet!

Poet: "How beautiful, how enchanting is the moonlight! There is nothing in nature so poetical. How often have I sung the praises of fair Luna in my poems." She: "Perhaps that's what makes her look so pale."

And Again he Failed.

"Will you be mine?" he faltered. She looked upon him with disdain. "I thought you knew better!" His head sank upon his breast. "I do," he answered, in a hollow voice, "but they have all refused me, one by one."

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PICTURE No. 2.

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Below you will find fifty-four pictorial squares, which when placed together in their proper position will form a complete picture.

Each square is numbered; that, however, has nothing to do with their correct position, of course. What we want you to do is to cut the jumble below into the fifty-four squares and carefully paste the squares in their correct order on to a sheet of paper.

When you have pasted up the complete picture keep it carefully together with the picture which appeared last week until you get next week's *Short Stories* containing the final picture. *Do not on any account send it in to us before you are told to do so.*

The twenty-five prize-winners will each be presented with a Handsome Gramophone.

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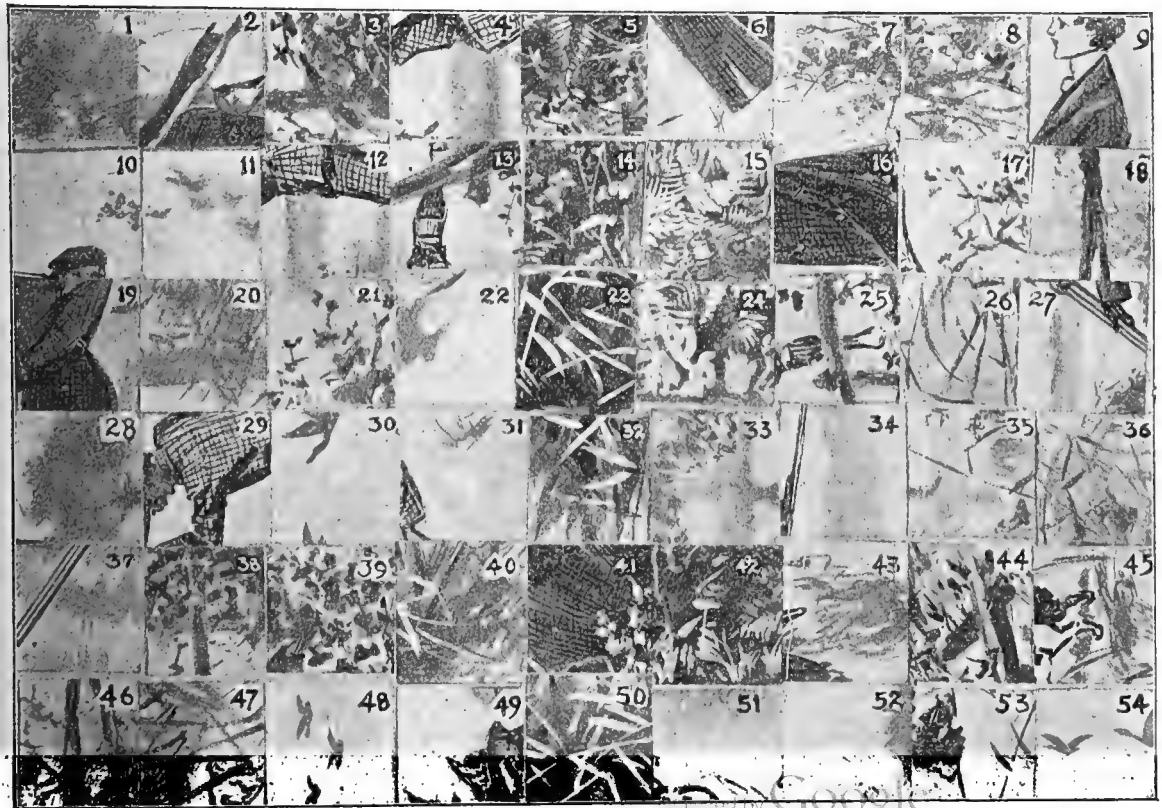
The Gramophone is one of the most delightful companions for the long winter evenings. None of your friends can talk like a talking machine can, and give you the same amount of fun as it produces. It is the very essence of good and genial companionship, which never tires you. What it says, or what it sings, is always interesting. Once you have heard it you want always to hear it, and it is ever-ready and willing to oblige.



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Penfold's Hidden Lover.

YOUNG PENFOLD was leaving those comfortable rooms of his in South Street. He had not been very careful with his money of late, and what with one thing and another, there had been little irregularities in regard to the payment of his weekly rent which had led good Mrs. Davies, his landlady, to suggest to him that he should find other quarters.

The luggage the cabman lifted on to the top of his vehicle was not on a very elaborate scale. There was a tin trunk, a couple of worn portmanteaux, and two or three boxes shaped with an unquestionable regard to hats. As he stepped into the cab he gave a final glance at the house where he had spent that last twelvemonth.

They had been a giddy twelve, those months. Could he count the number of supper parties Mrs. Davies had been ruefully summoned to cater for? Could he remember all the gay, boyish faces that had from time to time made merry there with him over countless bottles of wine? No, but still it had been a giddy time.

Now he was to bid farewell—not merely to the house, but to the chapter in his life to which it formed the background. That giddy life was, for the nonce, over. There was now nothing before him but work—hard, very hard work—for the little legacy his dead mother had bequeathed him a year ago was now all gone. He had nothing but his brains. They were good brains he fondly believed.

He had also, what was perhaps as much to the shallow world, a good face, at least, so Annie Garth thought as, from behind a curtain in his late bedroom, she took a last peep at it, as its possessor drove away in the cab. Annie was the housemaid at South Street, who had ministered to Leslie Penfold's needs during that twelvemonth. He had never said an abrupt word to her. If dinner had been late, and had kept him feverishly waiting, he had never been nasty about it. He had always accepted her lame excuses with a forced smile. If he had ever given an order, it had been as a kindly request, prefixed always by a "Would you, please." He had often smiled at her, too, and made a jolly remark, and he had, thought Annie, such a beautiful smile.

And now he was going—perhaps she would never see him again. Perhaps that flitting glance he gave towards the window would be the last that would ever meet hers. The dear boy she had looked after, to whose little wants she had ministered with feelings of delight—unconscious to him—was vanishing. And Annie knew only too well—servants diagnose these things on a system entirely their own—that Penfold was not facing a world of roses as he sped away in that cab. The address he had given for the forwarding of his letters was not a good address. It was far from as "classy" as South Street, and Annie knew, too, that he was not free from financial trouble, and was woman of the world enough to doubt if the boy would meet with much better a fate than most of the gentlemen she had known who "lived by their brains."

These thoughts it was, that accounted for the fact that when good Mrs. Davies entered the bedroom of her departed lodger, she found her faithful domestic sitting by the window in a flood of tears—a headache, she explained—and tears that, even when they did cease, only made way for sobs. Annie Garth had a heart, and, impossible though it seemed, that heart was a present accompanying Leslie Penfold and his belongings on that uninteresting journey to new and smaller lodgings in Bloomsbury.

This was all in the Spring, when people don't very much think about destiny and such things, and Leslie was not particularly downcast or dispirited when he entered those new lodgings. After all, he told himself, he had brains.

But there was to be an Autumn, and Autumn did not find him even in those lesser lodgings in respectable Bloomsbury. We must turn many times to the left and right, cross many mean, tram-lined thoroughfares, and evil-smelling streets, to trace our youth where Autumn found him.

It was not in respectable Bloomsbury, but Clerkenwell; not on the first floor, but the fifth, and in the back, too, that a young fellow sat with his head between his hands that following November. There was not here any neatly-laid meal on a clean tablecloth, awaiting him as he had entered that evening. And he was not wearing that fashionably-cut suit, and one of those spotless collars and neat ties that had in the old days shown his good looks to such advantage. The clothes he wore were threadbare, and his collar had known three days of active service, and a past which left its traces on its frayed edge.

He had not shaved very recently, and his light brown hair hung very shaggily on his head. His eyes were red, too, and underlined by black marks, the revelation of late hours and, perhaps, hard drinking. This was after six months of attempted employment of those brains, the goodness of which he had so confidently trusted the previous Spring.

On the table in front of him lay an outward and visible revelation of those brains in the shape of a manuscript, lying half outside an envelope, and inclosing a little single sheet of printed paper—that callous usher of evil, the editorial rejection form. Penfold had known many of these, and most of them had merely caused him a passing spasm of disappointment. He had never known despair, for, despite his worn appearance, he still hoped and trusted in those brains of his. But this last returned manuscript fell less lightly on him. He had not eaten much that day, and it was a matter of speculation where he should eat the following day. Under previous circumstances that would have troubled him little.

But to-night they were not. He felt, for the first time almost in his life, that insidious fever of depression which is the invariable forerunner of despair. In a moment it had overwhelmed him. A dark flash came to his eye, and he clenched his fists, and walked absently round the room. He opened the window hurriedly, and glanced down at the crowded street a hundred feet below. He wondered if there were palings at the bottom, and, remembering there were, closed the window. He glanced round the room as though seeking for something, but apparently did not see it. Then, as in a moment of resolve, he seized that faded, soft felt hat, and thrust it on his head, and with that same, wild look, and those clenched fists, he descended the narrow, creaking stairway, and emerged into the street.

He did not notice the figure of a woman standing close by, a woman dressed in neat black. And, as he walked hurriedly down the street, and turned several corners, emerging into Holborn, he did not know that a few yards behind him walked that same, solitary figure. Pausing here and there, as if in thought, he continued his course southward, reaching Fleet Street. It was empty and deserted. Those myriads of newspaper offices, now denuded of their occupants, seemed to mock at him as he passed. They seemed to be shouting welcome to all but himself. Such feelings of despair as had marked his departure from his lodgings increased as he

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walked down this thoroughfare, which was adding another to the list of the victims of its contemptuous rejection.

He wandered into the Temple Courts, silent and gloomy, and finally emerged on to the Embankment. He heard behind him a soft, pattering footstep, but had not looked round. If he had done so, he would have seen a little woman in black. And as he stood on the Embankment gazing into the black river, he little knew he was observed from behind the fence of the Temple Gardens. He stood looking into the water, his hand lightly gripping the stone. The grip was strengthening, he was beginning to raise himself up by his muscles to a seat on the Embankment wall. He was sitting on that wall, and was about to——

"Stop, for God's sake!"

He swung round from his dangerous position on the wall.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

He seemed to recognise the face; he could not remember where he had seen it. He had always had a bad memory, especially for girl's faces.

"Annie," she answered, "Annie Garth. Don't you remember me, Mr. Penfold, the housemaid at South Street? Don't jump over, Mr. Penfold, don't, for — for my sake."

"For your sake, Annie? What can I be to you?"

"You are all the world to me, Mr. Penfold. I have never dared to think of addressing you, but I have seen you often—every week—since you left South Street. I could not bear the idea of losing sight of you, and—but it's very silly."

He had hopped off the parapet to the ground, more with the motion of an athlete in form than a thwarted suicide.

"You, Annie? You love me? Good Heavens, then, there is someone in the world."

He grasped her hands in his.

"Tell me, Annie, how you came to trace me to this dreadful place."

"It is Thursday, sir, and my evening out. Where should I ever be on this night but somewhere where I might see you? As I always do on Thursday, I was waiting outside your lodgings for you to come out, and, as I have always done, I followed you as far as I could keep you in sight."

"But how came you to know where I was? I had drifted there, you know."

"I had found out. The servants had told me your address, and I had spent each Thursday evening outside, waiting for a glimpse of you."

She burst into tears.

"You are the only one in the world to me. You did not know it, but every word you spoke to me when I waited on you went through me. Oh, how mad I am! But at last something seems to have brought us together—the shadow of death. Had it not been the shadow, it would have been death itself, for if you had gone over there," she pointed to the river, "I should have followed you."

He kissed her.

"You have saved me from folly, Annie. You have showed me that my miserable being is something to somebody. Come on, let us forget about the hideous world."

And, her arm in his, he took her with a rapid stride back through the courts, into the Strand, and half an hour after, Fritz, the waiter of a little Italian restaurant, was getting two suppers for a "broken down gent" and a "skivvy," who, chatting as merrily as a pair of young lovers, sat gazing into each other's eyes.

The next day brought the usual-looking dispatch to Penfold. But inside it was not that callous rejection form, but a neat, red cheque for £5. His luck had turned. From that day his old life came back to him. He wrote and wrote, and buoyed up by success, his work grew better and better until it now confronts one's eyes almost everywhere the periodical reader looks. And in a little room in a cosy flat near Holborn sits a little woman, who incessantly types away as he dictates to her. Penfold's wife, Annie, makes an excellent amanuensis.

Vivian Carter.

Your Birthday This Week?

We have recently secured the services of a well-known astrologer, and below will be found his information for this week's birthdays.

September 23.—Those whose birthday occurs to-day will have a good year for health, and with care business will progress favourably.

Young girls will have anxiety over their love affairs; letters cause trouble.

The day is good for buying and selling; evil for marriage and pleasure-seeking.

A child born to-day will be very changeable, untidy, and much given to pleasure and the opposite sex.

September 24.—An unfavourable birthday, except to clerks, teachers, and travellers. Avoid speculation and keep business well in hand.

Girls born between four and five p.m. will need to be careful in their love affairs; much deceit and anxiety.

A good day to write letters; evil to ask favours, buy, or change residence.

A child born this day will be clever and ingenious, but improvident, and subject to accidents.

September 25.—A quiet, but rather fortunate year for business, health, and domestic affairs.

Love affairs are very interesting, and girls born near two and five p.m. become engaged or marry.

A good day for visiting, pleasure seeking, marriage, dealing with jewellers, doctors, or military men.

A child born here will be quick, good-tempered, and make many friends. Will be fortunate in business.

September 26.—An unfortunate year is shown; sickness in family; annoyance over business and many minor drawbacks. See to health.

Girls meet with disappointment in love affairs.

The day is evil for signing papers, dealing with elderly people, or buying property, or land.

A child born to-day will be timid, overcautious, and reserved. Should keep in the employ of others.

S ptember 27.—Beware of law, accident and losses during the next year. Insure against fire and mishap.

Young girls will need extra caution and prudence in love affairs.

An evil day to speculate, to make new friends, or engage servants. Beware of mishap from two to seven p.m.

A chi d born here will be unfortunate in life, headstrong, and improvident. If a girl, unlucky in marriage.

September 28.—An active and fortunate year for business. A lot of travel and movement. Many pleasant events occur.

Young girls have a favourable time for their love affairs; if born near four or seven p.m. they will receive offers of marriage.

A child born this day will be fond of travel, and never settle long in one place. Will be clever and of a cheerful disposition.

September 29.—A quiet year is promised, things go much as usual. Rather more favourable for those in employ.

Young girls receive attentions from married men and need care where they place confidence.

The day is good to ask favours, engage servants, and deal with shipping agents, and superiors.

A child born to-day will be rather fortunate. Fond of the mystical and of the sea. Will lack self-confidence.

Astarel.

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THE CONFESSIONS OF CYNTHIA.

Revelations in High Life by a Lady's Companion.

The writer of this series of true stories acted for many years in the capacity of lady's companion to a Society adventuress who lived by robbing her unsuspecting guests. Names have, for obvious reasons, been altered, but the facts are correct.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS:

Mrs. FRANCES NORTON	An adventuress who makes her money by robbing her friends.
CYNTHIA HAMILTON .	Her cousin and companion who, when the events related below took place, was quite unsuspicious of Mrs. Norton's guilt.
FLUFFY	An accomplice of Mrs. Norton's.
LORD KINROSS	One of Mrs. Norton's most devoted admirers.
SIR JOHN STRICKLAND	A poor baronet who is deeply in love with Mrs. Norton.
MARY VERNON . . .	At one time engaged to be married to Lord Kinross.
HIRAM PETTIGREW .	An American millionaire.
PERCIVAL HOPE . . .	Pettigrew's secretary.
CASELLIS	A man from Jamaica who knows Mrs. Norton's past history.

Frances Norton: Adventuress.

Cynthia Hamilton: Her companion.

NEW READERS START HERE.

HAVING arrived in England from a Bruges convent to be companion to my cousin, Frances Norton, I soon discovered that my cousin was taking part in midnight card games, at which large sums of money were lost and won. The climax came one night when Mary Vernon staked her diamond earrings (a gift from Lord Kinross), and one of the onlookers found them to be paste. The diamonds, it appears, were stolen by Mrs. Norton.

A few weeks later, my cousin stole a pocket-book, containing about eight thousand pounds in paper money, from Hiram Pettigrew, an American millionaire, at the Café Regal.

We moved into a house in Pont Street, and it was here that Sir John Strickland proposed to Frankie, and was refused.

Later on Lord Kinross called at Pont Street for a private interview, and during that interview Percival Hope entered the room unannounced, and made the startling statement that Mary Vernon had discovered the thief who stole her diamonds. Shortly afterwards Frankie left the room; but I stayed, and, unknown to Kinross and Percival Hope, overheard Hope (who turned out to be Kinross' cousin) tell Kinross that in a fortnight's time he would prove that Frankie was an adventuress living upon the proceeds of the robbery of her friends.

The next evening Lady Gaveston, Frankie's chaperon, informed her that she didn't approve of her behaviour towards Sir John Strickland, and that unless she decided at once either to marry or refuse him, she would return to Scotland. My cousin was given a fortnight's grace in which to make up her mind.

We went to the Derby, where Mrs. Curtis-Blount, instigated by jealousy, enticed me to bet heavily, by which I lost £800. Frankie also lost heavily, and to pay our debts, she prevailed upon a young fellow, by promising marriage, to sign his uncle's name to a bill for £5,000.

That same night, at the Duchess of Warminster's ball, my cousin came face to face with Casellis, a man from Jamaica, who knew all about her past life. Percival Hope brought him in. It was a critical moment, but once again Frankie scored, for she managed to buy his silence.

The next day marked the end of the fortnight, during which Hope was to obtain proofs of Frankie's guilt. Owing, however, to Frankie's ingenuity, the indictment failed miserably.

Kinross then formally asked Frankie to be his wife. They were still in conversation when Sir John Strickland arrived, He had not heard of Frankie's engagement.

Before I could stop him he had gone into the room where my cousin and Kinross were talking. At sight of them he staggered and fell in a dead faint. Doctors were called, and pronounced it a paralytic seizure. Toby next called. In three days his uncle's bill must be redeemed. If this was not done he vowed that he would shoot himself.

Frankie being in a desperate strait, then got a large sum of money by worming a state secret out of Dollie Grendale, the wife of an M.P., and selling it to Pettigrew.

Frankie's next adventure was to drug an American billiard player, whose opponent she had backed heavily. Pettigrew was present, and, seeing what was done, accused her when they were alone.

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FRANKIE REDEEMS HER DIAMONDS.

For a minute they faced each other, the man keen and determined, the woman flushed indeed and trembling, but resolute to fight to the last.

"Prove it," she said, "prove it."

"The proof's here in the drink," Pettigrew took up the glass again, "nothing else is wanted."

"Tell that to Lord Kinross, or any other of my friends, and see if they'll accept it as a proof. Something more will be required to convince anyone that a woman in my position drugged a fellow guest, here, in Lord Chesterton's house. We're not in the wilds of Texas, Mr. Pettigrew; we're living under civilised conditions. Such melodramatic happenings don't take place here."

Pettigrew smiled grimly.

"You play the game, Mrs. Norton," he said, "but I'm too old a hand to be bluffed. I'm not likely to mistake the taste of opium for anything else."

"That doesn't say I put it there?"

"I think I can settle that question. I happen to know you want £3,000—want it desperately, want it to-night. I can pretty well fix up the reason why you want it, and I know how you hoped to get it. You stood to win £3,000 from me if Slade lost the match."

"What then?" she asked, defiant still, though her eyes glanced restlessly, fearfully, towards the door, and her face grew white. "What then?"

"You determined at all risks that Slade should lose the match—and the risk you chose was this," and he held up the glass. "Do you want further proof? Do you think I shall have much difficulty in convincing Kinross or any other of your friends that you drugged Slade?"

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I shall make the affair public. To commence with, I'll inform Chesterton, Slade too, if he hasn't left the house."

"No!" she cried vehemently. "No!"

"Can you give me any reason why I should not?"

"What good will it do you? After all, nobody has been harmed, Slade will be all right in an hour or two. You haven't paid your bet," she added fiercely. "You haven't lost a penny."

"That's no thanks to you, Mrs. Norton."

"Think of the scandal, the awful scandal it will make. It will ruin me, do you hear?—ruin me—and how will that profit you?"

"It is a thing that no decent man could tolerate," he answered firmly.

Tall, and grim, and square, he stood, unyielding as a rock. Many things it was possible for Hiram Pettigrew to overlook and to forgive, but a mean and treacherous act towards a man whom you called friend, aroused him to passionate indignation. He was long past pity, nothing could touch or soften him.

As I looked at him, I feared poor Frankie's hour had come. It seemed to me that she, who had boasted herself more than a match for any man, at last had found her master.

The next moment I thought differently.

"You think I have acted meanly, despicably," she said, "and in your indignation you think no punishment can be too great. Do you know why you think so? Why are you so bitter and so hard towards me? Because"—she faced him proudly, her eyes ablaze, her head well up,—"because I am a woman. Oh, you may smile, you may deny it, tell yourself a thousand times it is not so. But I know better. Answer me this, if I were a man driven to desperation for the want of money to carry out some scheme, speculation, politics, any of the things by which men make both fortunes and success, would you judge me so hardly for having run so great a risk? If I were a man with a future, a brilliant future before me, would you, because of this one act, crush me, ruin me, spoil my chance for ever?"

"The cases aren't the same. The man as you present him, would have had some urgent reason for the act. You—" he sneered. "What was your reason? You wanted to indulge in some expensive folly, some extravagant freak—if you're not stopped to-day, you'll go to greater lengths to-morrow. When will you stop?"

"When I've attained my end—marriage with Lord Kinross. Can't you understand how hard I've had to fight, how desperately I've had to struggle to get as far as this? How can I help it if I have to use my wits to get out of this, my strength of will to out-manœuvre someone else? You won't treat me as an equal. You wouldn't have played a match at billiards with me to-night, nor employ me on the Stock Exchange to-morrow. And yet there's not a man more capable than I." Then with a swift change she bent towards him.

"As you are strong, be merciful," she said. "I'm not a craven or a coward, but I ask, I beg for mercy."

She clasped her hands round his arm, and looked beseechingly at him.

Pettigrew cleared his throat.

"I'm sorry," he commenced, but she drew closer, clinging tightly to him. He made an effort to disengage himself, but it was only a faint one.

As they stood together, her white face raised to his, there came a sound of footsteps in the hall.

In an agony of terror lest the others should return before my cousin had persuaded Pettigrew to silence, I rushed to the door, hoping to delay them. I was too late, Chesterton had already crossed the threshold. Frankie, watching over Pettigrew's shoulder, saw him enter. In another moment the American would see him, would speak to him, and then—

With a despairing effort she flung her arms round Pettigrew's neck, and reaching up, kissed him on the lips.

Chesterton advancing, saw the embrace. He stopped short with a hurried exclamation. Frankie, in blushing confusion, disengaged herself. Pettigrew stood motionless, silent as a sphinx.

I caught my breath, surely he couldn't tell after—after what had happened. Besides, Chesterton would hardly listen to anything to Frankie's discredit from Pettigrew now.

The American caught my imploring look, and a smile twitched at the corners of his mouth.

"I congratulate you, Mrs. Norton," he said quietly. "You've won—the bet." And with that he departed, with a farewell nod to Chesterton, who returned the salutation somewhat coolly.

His lordship saw us to our carriage in silence. He smiled at me, however, when he said "good-bye." Turning to Frankie he remarked pointedly—

"Does Kinross return soon?"

"To-morrow," answered Frankie.

"I think it's time," he said. Then—"Do you think I'd better advise him not to leave town again just yet?"

"I know he's always glad of your advice, Lord Chesterton. But," she bent forward, leaning out of the carriage window, "if you tell tales, so shall I."

"My dear Mrs. Norton, I protest——"

Frankie interrupted with a laugh.

"I've not forgotten Mrs. Curtis-Blount," she said, "neither has Cynthia. Home, Fletcher," she called to the coachman, and we drove off, leaving his lordship quite discomfited.

I was too nervous and

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excited with all I had gone through to wish to talk that night, but Frankie showed an unusual disposition to chatter.

"I never thought I could persuade him, Cynthia. I never should if Chesterton hadn't arrived just at the critical moment. I am so thankful, so delighted. It's glorious to win a fight with a man like that against you."

"Frankie, did you really mean all that you said about Pettigrew's judging a man differently from a woman?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I don't know if I believe it—but it's true. Look, Cynthia," she leant towards me, tilting her face in her hands—a rose leaf 'twixt two lilies. "What value do you think my cleverness would be to me without my face? Brains are all a man wants to get on in the world, they're no good to a woman without beauty."

"But you have both, Frankie."

"Yes, so I beat both men and women."

I pondered over what she said. Frankie had never spoken like that before, at any rate, I had not heard her. Her speech to Pettigrew much impressed me. It sounded a little like a speech I had heard at a political meeting I'd attended with Lady Gaveston, a meeting in favour of giving women votes.

Frankie had always warned me not to be political, she said it was the last refuge of disappointed spinsters, and that no man would tolerate them at any price.

I came to the conclusion that Frankie must have read the report of the speech I mentioned, she couldn't have said that sort of thing herself.

The next morning I woke early, troubled with the reflection that Kinross was returning that evening to accompany Frankie to Lady Daventry's dance, and that despite all her manœuvring, my cousin had not been able to get the money for her diamonds.

I expected to find Frankie horribly depressed, but, on the contrary, she was in the highest spirits. She had put on a delightful gown of pale blue linen, and wore a knot of cornflowers in her belt.

"Somebody's coming to see me this morning, Cynthia," she said. "Guess?"

Of course I mentioned every name but the right one; Kinross, Percival Hope, Chesterton, Cassilis.

"Wrong every time," she cried. "You little goose, who should it be but Pettigrew?"

"Surely not, after last night?"

"What happened last night will make him come all the more. There"—as the door bell sounded, followed by a sharp, short knock. "I knew I was right, that's he. Come, Cynthia," she took my hand, "we'll beard the lion together."

Hiram greeted her in his usual fashion, friendly and admiring.

"You're looking very well," he said, "and seem quite pleased to see me. Perhaps you can guess why I'm here?"

"Of course I can. You've come to pay your debts. You're going to hand me over the £3,000 I won last night."

Her audacity took my breath away. Pettigrew, however, seemed amused by it.

"I do admire you, Frankie," he said with a drawl.

It was the first time he'd used my cousin's Christian name. Somehow I did not like the way in which he said it.

"I always knew you had good taste," she answered.

"It's an expensive luxury at times," he said, and looked straight at her.

She laughed.

"I find it so," she said. "What of my cheque, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"I haven't my cheque-book with me—or my pocket-book, the one you gave me, either."

"That's of no consequence. You can write 'pay bearer so much' on a sheet of note-paper. It will hold good."

"I'm not signing anything like that this morning."

"I think you are. I will go further and say I'm sure you are."

"You're clever, Mrs. Norton."

"Sometimes, not always. To-day, for instance, I fee too utterly soft-hearted. A child could impose on me."

"A mighty cute child it would have to be."

"You're fond of children, Mr. Pettigrew?"

"I am. My own are both grown up, and I'm half sorry that they've left off being small. I've two sons, Mrs. Norton, one sixteen, the other twenty."

"I shall hope to know them some day."

Pettigrew smiled inscrutably, somehow I fancied he did not share the hope.

"You haven't told me how your wife is, Mr. Pettigrew? I trust she's better? She must feel your being away from her so often?"

There was a suggestion of malice in the speech, but he ignored it.

"Thank you, Mrs. Pettigrew is better. She suffers with her heart; so long as she is quiet she is fairly well, but anything in the nature of excitement upsets her directly. I'm told a shock of any kind would have a very bad effect."

"How sad. You must keep unpleasant things from her at any cost."

"I do. My wife has every care."

He did not speak with much enthusiasm, I thought; there was no tenderness in his voice such as had crept in when he mentioned his sons.

"It would be a bad thing for your boys to lose their mother," she said.

He nodded and displayed a wish to change the conversation.

Frankie relentlessly kept him to the point.

"It's a shame that the woman always has to stay at home, while a man can roam at will. A wife gets all sorts of fancies in her head when her husband is away, and then"—Frankie rose and went to her *escritoire*—"people say such hard things. No one is ever safe from gossip. What with paragraphs and interviews and what Society says and does facing one in every paper, it's a wonder anybody's name escapes. Have you seen this"—as she spoke she picked up a paper, apparently a press cutting, and held it towards Pettigrew.

"It's a proof of an article that's going into next week's *Gossipy Notes*. I'll read you a paragraph, it will interest you."

"The latest society beauty is adding daily to the ranks of her admirers," she commenced. "*On dit* the last addition is a certain wealthy American who is more than a little infatuated. It is suggested that sensational developments are expected likely to lead to a *cause célèbre* in the divorce courts."

"Well," said Frankie. "What do you think of that?"

"It's pretty scandalous. I suppose the beauty referred to is yourself?"

"Precisely."

"And the—American?" She looked up in his face.

"Can you doubt it is yourself?"

"Well, if you don't mind," he said, "it won't affect me."

"No?" She put down the paper and came quite close to him. "But your wife—what of her?"

Their eyes met in a quick challenge.

"She is delicate, you know, and can't stand the least excitement," Frankie's voice was mocking, "she is jealous and exaggerates trifles into happenings of great importance. Oh"—as he made a gesture of denial, "I know what I'm saying, you're not the only person who finds out other people's affairs. I have studied your family history to some purpose. If your wife sees *this*," she glanced at the proof, "she will magnify it, enlarge upon it, she will throw herself into an illness, and in a burst of outraged affection make the affair a nine days' wonder in the press. Then"—Frankie threw out her hands—"your domestic peace is shattered, your wife a helpless invalid, your sons estranged, worse than all your credit damaged, *now* shall she see it?" Frankie advanced and stood triumphantly before him.

Pettigrew's face grew dark, his mouth tightened, and he clenched his hands. For a moment I thought passion would get the better of him, but with an effort he mastered himself.

"Your price?" he said.

Frankie swept him a deep courtesy. "I only ask my own,"

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she said, "three thousand pounds in payment of my bet."

Without another word he sat down at the escritoire, and taking a sheet of note-paper wrote out a cheque for the amount.

Frankie smiled and thanked him sweetly.

The millionaire did not respond. "We've tried two falls, Mrs. Norton," he said slowly, "and each time you've come out, as the boys say, on top. I never bear malice, I always own when I am beaten. Only"—he turned and looked at her keenly—"beware the third." He left without another word. Frankie, in a fever of excitement, rang for the carriage, and tore off to redeem her diamonds.

She went straight to her room when she returned and remained there the rest of the day. Not till Lord Kinross called to take her to the dance did she appear.

She was looking exquisitely lovely. A shade paler than usual, there was a suggestion of delicacy in the waxen skin, the heavy lidded eyes. Her gown a shimmering tissue of gold, sewn with pearls and glittering with tiny rubies, was a cream. In her hair she wore a ruby star, and the diamonds—the diamonds that had cost so dear—were round her throat.

Kinross was very tender to her. She looked so young and so fragile, so appealing, with a touch of sadness in her eyes—and a pathetic droop to her mouth. Quite unlike the brilliant Frankie we all knew so well.

Lady Gaveston, in snuff-coloured satin with chrysanthemums to match, was entirely pleased with herself, and condescended to express approval of my frock. I wore lettuce green chiffon over seashell pink, with pink carnations in my hair.

The evening was a great success, the theatricals were good and the tableaux better.

Frankie as usual created a sensation, and hadn't dances enough to satisfy half the demand.

The event of the evening was the arrival of a certain Grand Duke, who condescended to grace the assemblage for a short time. Among his *aides-de-camp* was a Hungarian, one of the most magnificent creatures I have ever seen, very tall, handsome and most distinguished, his litho figure set off by his splendid uniform blazing with orders.

He asked almost immediately to be presented to my cousin; they met in the middle of the room, the handsomest man and woman there.

As he bent over her hand I saw a faint flush steal over my cousin's face, her eyes drooped, she seemed to lose her self-possession.

What could it mean, she who never knew timidity?

Later I learnt the reason. It was one fraught with danger—danger to Frankie, to the Hungarian—danger to me.

Much, much was to date from that meeting.

(The outcome of this meeting will be told next Tuesday. This series began in No. 702 of SHORT STORIES. *Back numbers may be ordered through any newsagent.)*

Your Editor Chats.

THIS week I would impress upon readers the usefulness of the Gramophones which are being offered in connection with SHORT STORIES. Each instrument, together with two records, is worth £2 17s. 0d., and will give an enormous amount of pleasure to those who are lucky enough to secure them. The instruments are remarkable for their power, and the human voice is reproduced with such exactness that it is practically impossible at a distance to tell whether a person is singing or whether it is the Gramophone.

Moreover, it is possible to make money out of the Gramophone by hiring it out at concerts or musical evenings during the winter. It is quite possible to make ten or fifteen shillings a week in this manner. So that you see, if you win a Gramophone it may be the means of considerably adding to your income.

MISS MADGE MORRIS ALL RIGHT AGAIN.

I am happy to be able to tell you that Miss Madge Morris has quite recovered from the shock which she received as the result of being thrown out of a hansom cab. As you will see, she has now resumed her duties as conductor of the feature "In Confidence."

THE TARTAN COVERS.

Several lady readers have written to tell me that the Tartan covers which have already appeared on SHORT STORIES have been used by them for pasting up in scrap books. Sometimes the complete Tartan has been pasted in, at others, a framework of Tartan has been placed around some picture or other, forming a very pretty frame. This idea is certainly a bright one and I recommend it to all those readers who keep scrap books.

Another correspondent wants to know how many Tartans we are going to produce. . . . They will appear at intervals for some time to come, and will form quite a valuable collection when they are all published.

Your Editor.

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Cousin Goldbags.

In which Love and a Fortune are Offered as Alternatives.

Poor George Clements! To look at him as, morning by morning, he passed up the same street, crossed the road at the same point, met the same fellow-worker on the same spot opposite the same shop, was to realise that the man whose life was so monotonous was indeed in need of sympathy. And truly Fate had not been kind to George Clements—until lately. The afterthought of "until lately" is the addition he himself would have made if anyone had so spoken to him.

Bereft of his mother, and with a father rendered hopelessly incapable by an accident, he had been thrown at an early age on his own resources. A clerkship in a London firm, very long hours for very small pay, had been his lot since then, and that was fifteen years ago. He had laboured hard for all those fifteen years with scarcely a break, but his advancement was terribly slow and the drain on his purse heavy, for he and his married sister in the north shared the expense of supporting the poor old father in something like comfort. They came of an independent family, and so it came about that after fifteen years of laborious work George Clements had still no money in the savings bank.

About thirty months before this time he had taken a trip into the country—his one holiday—and there he had fallen in with two companions who, it appeared, were distant relatives. They patronised him rather, it is true, but to him anything was better than the deadly monotony of the same morning walk, the same high office stool, which was beginning to eat into his soul, and it was on his return that his life—as he put it—began.

For now he noticed another who came out of a house a few doors below his own, walked up the street at the same time as he did, crossed at the same corner. It was a girl in her twenties, in a simple black dress—how neatly arranged—with soft, brown hair, a pale, tired face, and a certain sweet dignity of manner; for Jenny—dear, gentle Jenny—was a lady, alone now and penniless, who worked for a living wage.

Chance threw them directly in contact with each other one day, and an acquaintance was formed which soon developed into a friendship, and this still sooner into unavowed love. For Clements was too poor to marry, and Jenny could bring nothing towards a home. Still, it had come to be tacitly understood between them that if, and when it was possible, they would join their little, sad fortunes; and so, perhaps, George Clements was not so "poor" after all. He would not bind her, for he was independent and honest, and Jenny must be free to make a better marriage as was only her due, so he said to himself, but Jenny thought otherwise.

And now Fate suddenly remembered the toiling clerk.

There came to the boarding-house where he lived a breezy old gentleman, an old gentleman gruff of voice and kind of eye; a dictatorial old gentleman who laid down the law to the landlady till she was quite bewildered, and then filled her children's pockets with sweets. An eccentric old gentleman, who tipped the crossing-sweepers and helped nervous ladies across the street. He installed himself in the house, this hale, bluff, hearty old man, turned everything upside down until he was thoroughly comfortable, which, curiously, at the same time made everybody else thoroughly comfortable, and then settled down to an indefinite stay. He seemed to take a fancy to "poor George Clements," and was always ready to scold him, lecture him, advise him, encourage him, cheer him, and from whom he drew out all the story of his grey, uneventful life.

It was some three months after his arrival that one evening he called the younger man into his room, and then proceeded to double lock the door, and draw a heavy curtain across it.

"Sit down, my boy, sit down," said he, heartily. And Clements obeyed, feeling considerably puzzled. "You didn't know," said the old man after an embarrassed pause, "that I was a relation of yours. I thought not. No, don't speak"—he held up his hand imperatively—"yet I am a sort of uncle to you. I have hunted it all out, and yet four months ago I had never even heard of your existence. I have lived all my life in America, far out in the backwoods for many years, and the country has been kind to me and brought me in money by the sackful. And now this is how I found you out. You passed a holiday two years ago at Cavemore, didn't you? Yes, I thought so"—up went the hand again—"and met two of your relatives there, very cock-a-hoop young men. Well, I was there a few months back, and those same two soon hunted me up. Oh, yes; it was 'Cousin Dawes Cousin Dawes' from morning till night. Cousin Goldbags was what they meant. I told them at last—ha, ha!—that poor relations of mine should never touch my dollars, and it was wonderful how they proved to me that they were fine young gentlemen farmers. And from them I learnt of you, my lad—that hint about the poor relations had put them off the scent—and so I came to this house just to see you, my boy."

He clapped the other on the shoulder, blew his nose loudly, and then went on:

"And why did I want to see you? To find out whether I liked you well enough to—— My boy, I'm a very rich old chap, and I haven't got an heir, and I want someone who will be a son to me. Well, what do you think of it?"

He brought out his great proposal so abruptly and boldly at the end that for a few minutes Clements sat stunned. What, no more drudgery, no more deferred hopes, and Jenny—dear, sweet Jenny—to be his at last; his to surround with comfort and beauty, his to protect against all pain and evil as his heart had often ached to protect her!

The old man turned back from the window, where he had been gazing out on the street.

"Well, my boy?" he said. George looked up. His eyes were full of tears and his hands trembled.

"Sir," he gasped, "thank you! God bless you——" and here his voice failed.

His benefactor fidgeted about the room, altering the ornaments, moving the chairs, even opening and shutting the door; but at last, coming to a halt in front of his visitor, he broke out in his gruff voice and most dictatorial manner:

"But I must make some conditions."

"Dear Mr. Dawes," cried Clements, who had somewhat recovered himself, "what could I refuse you? Your great kindness—but I cannot find words to thank you, sir; only I would like to say that I am most gratefully and entirely at your orders."

The old man nodded approvingly.

"I belong to America," he said, "and I am going back at once. We will go together." He brought his fist down upon the table. "You must leave this life behind you. You are not happy here, so you won't mind, and I do not wish to be reminded of it either. You must break with your present surroundings entirely, sir. This is what I want you to do."

Clements raised his head, his face slowly turning white. It was a sturdy, honest face, and now the mouth tightened into lines of invincible determination.

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"Mr. Dawes," he said, "if that includes Jenny, I can't accept your offer. I couldn't desert Jenny, sir; not for any money you or anyone else could offer."

"But don't you see, you silly fellow? You're not formally engaged?"

"No, sir."

"And it's very unlikely if you stay as you are that you'll ever be able to marry. You break no pledge; you even give up no happiness of which you are sure. Now, with me and the position my money gives us, you can marry any lady you please. Come, my boy, you surely won't throw all your future away upon a chance!"

"That can't be helped, sir. She trusts me, and comes to me with her affairs, and I look after her as best I can. I can't desert Jenny, sir. Even though I could never marry, still, here I am at her side, and I can do much for her protection in many ways, and that is sufficient happiness for me. Thank you, sir, for all your proposed kindness, but I couldn't desert my Jenny."

Clements lifted his head with unconscious dignity as the emphatic words that put all success for ever beyond him fell from his lips.

"Listen to him!" broke in the old man testily. "I offer him everything, I propose making him my heir, a man who has no claim upon me, and whom I had never even heard of before this year, and he throws it all back in my face. You'll accept, sir, oh, yes, easily enough, as if you were doing me the favour, on the principle of taking all and giving nothing, and throw it up ungratefully the moment I ask for any return. Without even reflecting for a time over my condition, without paying me such a small compliment as that. Oh, no, I'm the hard taskmaster at once; my offer is rejected, flung back in my teeth, and all because of what—because of a chance when you are a decrepid old man of being able to marry a woman who will probably be in her grave by that time. There, get out of my room!"

"Sir," said Clements, rising, "I am, indeed, most grateful to you for your undeserved——" But his uncle waved him impatiently to the door, and he crept sadly away.

He spent a sleepless night, and Jenny cast many a troubled look at him the next morning as they trudged side by side to their work. He was very gentle to her, very protective, and once he stopped and bought her a tiny bunch of flowers, offering it almost apologetically. She had been so nearly an heiress, he mused wearily, for it was already as "Jenny's fortune" that he had thought of the proposals of yesterday. As it had haunted him all the night, so it haunted him all the day—that offer of yesterday that had so suddenly opened up a vista of happiness before him only to withdraw it even more abruptly.

It was Saturday—happy Saturday—and he was free at an early hour, but instead of waiting for Jenny as was his wont, he dragged himself sadly back to the boarding-house and up to his room, tired in body and mind. The first thing that caught his attention was an envelope on the empty table, and mechanically he picked it up and opened it. The next moment he started back in amazement, almost in fear, for there fell out of the paper and slowly drifted to the floor, a fifty-pound banknote and with it a torn leaf, on which were scrawled a few words.

George Clements was trembling; almost reverently he replaced the money on the table. Was this really to go towards that almost impossible home for Jenny, or was there some condition attached again that would wrest the banknote from him as it had wrested his hope of a fortune?

In an agony of apprehension he bent down for the letter. It had slipped under a piece of furniture, and he spent a feverish five minutes before he could capture it.

It contained only a couple of lines in a crochety scrawl, and wonderingly he pieced out the hieroglyphics.

"To buy an engagement ring for Miss Jenny. She will explain it all."

He stared at the paper in mute astonishment. It was from Mr. Dawes; he had guessed that from the beginning, but—but this was such a contradiction. And what did Jenny—dear Jenny—know about it?

A flash of light burnt in his eyes which a moment before had been dull with disappointment and sleeplessness. There was something behind this—something he had not guessed at—something that suggested a hidden hope. Vague possibilities began to crowd in on his brain, at times threatening, but always opening out in the end into wide dreams of an intangible, happy future. Jenny knew—he must see Jenny at once.

Then, snatching up his hat, he bounded down the stairs and out into the street. Had he ever moved so boyishly before? Had such a rainbow-tinted vision ever flashed before his eyes in the past with such suggestions of a probable fulfilment! A minute brought him to Jenny's lodgings; he was in the sitting-room; the door was opening; it was Jenny's own sweet face that he saw.

But now suddenly a bashfulness fell upon him, a terrible fear lest his golden hopes were to be broken again and for ever. He could only murmur hoarsely:

"Tell me! tell me!"

She stopped his stammering words with uplifted hand.

"I think you ought to read this," she said simply.

She held out a letter to him, and his blurred eyes recognised the handwriting. Eagerly he took it from her, and she half turned away as if to hide her face as he opened it and began to scan the lines:

"Dear Miss Jenny,—You have won a heart of gold. I am his uncle, and I have lived in this house for three months on purpose to satisfy myself about him, and I am now about to give a signal proof of my opinion. I am a very rich old man, and I long ago determined not to leave my money to any relation who set it above other ideals. In my search for such a man I travelled far, and I never knew before I started on this hunt what crowds of blood relations I possessed. But they none of them satisfied me. Quite recently I heard for the first time of the existence of George, and I came up to London with small hope of satisfaction so far as he was concerned. He soon put my doubts to rest, Miss Jenny, and last night I offered to make him my heir but on condition that he sacrificed you, my dear. I do you the honour of believing that you will understand my reason, and he has fully justified my trust in him. As I expected, he flung back my proposal, and even without hesitation. I need not tell you that after this I have adopted him as my son. And you, my child, come and be a daughter to a lonely old man who needs a little love very badly. George knows nothing of all this—I have left him to hear it from your own lips.

God bless you, my dear,

"Philip Dawes."

Clements looked up at the girl. A bright colour burnt in her cheeks as she drooped shyly over the table, and as he gazed, a gentle tear gathered and lost itself unheeded in the lace at her breast. She raised her head and her sweet eyes met his, now as bright and eager as any boy's.

The letter fell to the ground between them as he stretched out his arms.

"Jenny!" he called softly.

* * * * *

A month later, a brisk old gentleman and two younger companions, evidently a newly-married couple, stood upon the deck of one of the great ocean liners and watched the blue English shores slowly dip below the horizon. The father—or so he seemed—turned to the husband and wife, and his bright eyes were twinkling as he saked:

"Well, Mrs. Jenny, and have you forgiven me yet for my horrible treachery to you?"

The lady was hanging on his arm, and she only smiled in reply. It is curious how much a smile can be made to mean by a pretty woman.

J. Pritchard.

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The Man of the Miniature.

Or, in Love with a Portrait.

No one suspected that the visit to that old country house would leave an impression on the mind of seven-year-old Agnes Wilton that the course of her life in later years would be materially affected by it. Her mother, Mrs. Wilton, certainly did not suspect it. Yet, so it was.

It was a quaint house, not a large one, but full of curious antique furniture and ornaments, dating back to the early years of the reign of George III. There were strange brass candlesticks, miniatures of persons who had flourished about the year 1800—in short, it was more like a curio shop than a dwelling house. Its owner was Mrs. Monmouth, an old lady of sixty, or thereabouts, whose dress and manners were old-time, and in complete accordance with the furniture and all that surrounded her.

Mrs. Monmouth had been the bosom friend of Mrs. Wilton's mother, and Mrs. Wilton felt it incumbent on her to pay the old lady a visit from time to time. While her mother was talking to her hostess, Agnes decided that she could roam over the house and inspect all the curious things it contained.

The oaken chests attracted her, with their ornamental carvings of goblin heads; the great, four-post bedstead was an object of awe, but the hand-painted miniatures interested her more than anything else. She went from room to room in search of a fresh one, and at last entered an apartment where she espied one that captivated her entirely.

The others had been of elderly men and women, but this one was the portrait of a young man, probably of five-and-twenty years, with a bright, handsome face, merry-looking eyes, and a firm mouth just curved for a smile. Agnes was too young to read those details, but she was charmed by the general appearance of the young man, and the position of the lips, denoting a desire to laugh, impressed her greatly. A pleasant smile always attracts children, and Agnes was emboldened to take the miniature from the bracket and gaze at it more intently.

"If you were my uncle I should love you very much!" she decided, turning the miniature at different angles, and noting that the eyes appeared to follow her at every turn.

She looked at the back of the gold setting, and there she saw two locks of hair, one dark and the other fair, with the initials H. F. The discovery did not interest her particularly, so she again looked at the face.

"Agnes!"

Her mother's voice recalled her to herself. She hurriedly replaced the miniature, and ran downstairs to answer the call. They went into the garden, but Agnes took no notice of the flowers that were growing, nor did she remember how long they stayed with Mrs. Monmouth; all her thoughts were centred on the miniature.

Agnes never visited the house again, and the memory of it faded from her mind, except that she retained a hazy vision of the face in the miniature. She went away to school and developed into a beautiful maiden ere the recollection of that face was brought back to her in all its vividness. She seemed to recall the smile, and that it was a face to love, but the whole picture did not come back to her till Fate threw the miniature once more into her hands.

Whether it was that the love of the antique was born in her, or whether that childish impression had engendered the fondness for ancient things, she could not determine, but the fact remained that she developed a great liking for antiques and curios. She was constantly on the watch for small "bargains" of that description, such as she could afford out of the generous supply of pin money allowed by her father. Among her young lady friends she was secretly regarded as a bit of a crank on the subject, and they wondered how so charming a girl could bestow so much attention on musty, out-of-date articles.

There was one curio dealer, in a little shop situated in an off-street in a large West End thoroughfare, who knew Miss Wilton very well. She was often in his shop, looking for things that she was able to buy, and admiring other articles which were beyond the limits of her purse. When anything likely to suit Miss Wilton came into his hands he invariably reserved it for her to have the first chance of acquiring it.

"Good morning, Miss Wilton," said the curio dealer one morning, as Agnes entered the shop, "I have something here which appears to be in your line."

"Oh, what is that?" queried Miss Wilton, with evident interest. "Let me see it, please."

The shopkeeper brought a small, cardboard box from the back of the dingy office and placed it on the counter. Removing the lid and a layer of tissue paper, he drew out an object that made Agnes utter a cry of surprise and pleasure.

"I believe it is the very one!" she cried, taking it from him. "Yes, it is! The miniature I saw in that old country house, and there are the two locks of hair, and the initials at the back!"

It all came back to her. There was the handsome face, the merry eye, the lips parted ready to smile. The costume of the early years of the nineteenth century—the frilled shirt, the scarlet coat and the stock round the neck. Agnes gazed at it with eager eyes.

"I must have it!" she declared. "Where did you get it, and how much do you want for it?"

The dealer smiled at her eagerness, but he was too honest and too partial to his beautiful young customer to take advantage of her enthusiasm and raise the price.

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"It was brought here about a week ago by a respectable old lady, who said it was hers, and who wanted to sell it. I did not doubt that it was her own property, and, to speak the truth, I believe she was very hard up. Quite an old woman I should say, although she carried her years well. I'll let you have it for five shillings more than I paid her; I think that's fair—I must earn a living out of my business."

"Hard up!" echoed Agnes. "Poor old lady! But you have her address?"

No, he had not asked for it. Agnes was disappointed, for she knew how small a chance there was of finding the old lady and helping her. She was positive that the seller of the miniature was Mrs. Monmouth.

It was with rather a sad heart, in spite of her pleasure at having secured the miniature, that she returned home.

Her mother smiled and quieted her fears; the dealer had no positive information and, moreover, the old lady was well-connected, and her relations would not have allowed her to be in want. Mrs. Wilton had lost sight of Mrs. Monmouth, who had removed from the old house.

Had Agnes' friends known how she treated that miniature they would have felt perfectly justified in calling her a crank. There was a ring in the setting, and Agnes attached a gold chain to the miniature, passing the chain round her neck, and wearing the miniature in the bosom of her dress. Often and often when alone, she drew forth the treasure and gazed long and earnestly at the features of that young gallant of a century ago, whose features appeared so real, so life-like, that she sometimes looked up, fancying that the original might have stepped into the room unawares and be smiling at her admiration.

At night, before retiring, she hung the miniature on a nail over the head of her bed, and one night she laughed confusedly as she caught herself saying—"You will act as a protecting spirit. I can imagine that you were a strong and honourable defender of our sex when you were alive. With you near her, a woman need fear no danger!"

"How foolish I am!" Agnes exclaimed. "Yet, I think my opinion is correct. I am sure it is! Alive? It seems as if he ought to be alive and just like that, but he is—dead!"

Her gaiety vanished, a troubled expression overspread her lovely features, and she sighed unconsciously as she turned from her contemplation of the miniature to that of her own reflection in the mirror.

Two days later there came an invitation to a fancy-dress ball, which threw Agnes into an ecstasy of delight.

"Do you know, mamma, that is the very opportunity I have been waiting for!" she declared. "Ever since I discovered that old-style dress in the chest upstairs I have been looking for a chance of wearing it. Now it has come. The dress fits me fairly well, and with a few alterations and a little touching up, it will do splendidly."

Mrs. Wilton laughed.

"I suppose the dress belonged to some ancestor of your father, Agnes. I really cannot understand why it was so carefully preserved, but that is how things happen in this world. The mother saves it for the daughter, who venerates it because it was her mother's, and she hands it down to her daughter, who, not having known much of her grandmother, doesn't set much store by it, and keeps it to please her mother. In time, the old thing is turned out by some practical descendant, who doesn't want useless articles. I don't believe anyone knew what was in that chest. Well, wear it if it pleases you."

Agnes arrayed herself in the ancient gown and ruffle, and did her hair after the fashion of long ago. She looked quite like a grand young lady of the Georges'; one might have fancied the Regent bowing to her and requesting the favour of a dance. Agnes thought something of the same kind, but with this difference—that instead of the future George IV. standing in front of her, it was H. F., the man of the miniature.

Agnes was all excitement during the intervening days, but at length the great evening arrived. She created envy and admiration in the ballroom, for she was the prettiest girl there, and her quaint costume became her marvellously. Round her neck was a chain, the end of which disappeared within the front of her bodice. It is needless to say that the miniature was attached to the chain.

Agnes' eyes wandered over the room in search of someone, and just a shadow of disappointment clouded her bright face.

"I felt certain that I should meet *him* here," she murmured. "Yet it was foolish, I suppose! But that dream last night was so real. He came up to me and was about to speak, my heart seemed to give a bound of delight, and then I awoke! I wonder what he was going to say?"

She was seated in a quiet corner just then, while Mrs. Wilton was chatting to a friend near by. She drew forth the miniature and gazed at it longingly. Her mother's voice caused her to put it away hastily.

"My dear Agnes, we must be making our way to the scene of action and not sit here in this quiet nook. Whatever made you bring that portrait?"

"Part of the costume, mother dear!" replied the girl brightly, affecting not to notice the tone of reproof and vexation. "Oh!"

Mrs. Wilton, startled by the exclamation, followed the direction of her daughter's glance, and also uttered a little "Oh!"

"There he is, coming this way!" murmured Agnes.

"That young man looks just like the portrait—your miniature, I mean, Agnes! How extraordinary!"

Two gentlemen were approaching, one was an elderly man who looked inelegant in a cavalier's dress, and the other was a handsome young fellow who, as Mrs. Wilton remarked, was exactly like the treasured portrait. If Agnes had looked pretty previously, she now became positively bewitching as the colour mounted to her cheeks and her eyes sparkled with joy.

"May I introduce my friend—Harry Fairfax——"

That was all that Agnes heard. Her brain was in a whirl for a few seconds, and when she recovered her self-possession she was seated next to him, and he was talking to her.

"Do you know, Miss Wilton, I was afraid that I should find no one here with a costume corresponding with mine chronologically. My friend, Mr. Bateman, was even willing to bet on it, and I was so sure that he would win that I declined the offer. But I had not been here five minutes before I saw you, and I maintain that our costumes match exactly. It is almost as if we had known each other, but——"

"I seem as if I do know you, although we have never met," said Agnes shyly. "Is this not like you?"

She drew the miniature from its hiding place and held it out to him. He stared at it in amazement.

"It certainly is!" he exclaimed. "But where did you get it?"

Agnes briefly explained.

"Your name, too, is 'H. F.' is it not?" she asked. "Can it be the likeness of a member of your family?"

"Mrs. Monmouth," he mused aloud, "I seem to have heard the name. That portrait must be the likeness of my great-great-grandfather. We have a similar one of his brother, and it was from that miniature that I got the idea of dressing in this fashion. I have been told that I resemble my ancestor. I bear the same name, certainly. Mrs. Monmouth was probably his daughter, the sister of my—— Oh, I forget who, but that doesn't matter! Do you know, Miss Wilton, I envy you!"

"Why?" asked Agnes wonderingly, and she could not help observing how, at that moment, he resembled the portrait. It was the same curve of the lips, ready for a smile, the same merry eyes.

"Because you have known me so long, and I have only just made your acquaintance!" he answered pointedly. "See what an immense advantage you have had over me!"

There was no time to reply, for the first dance was beginning and Agnes was claimed for it, but she could not hide the tell-tale blush which made Harry Fairfax wish to push her partner aside and take her off to a seat where he could say all that was surging within him.

They danced together several times, and an attentive

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observer would have noticed that Agnes was all life and movement when Harry Fairfax was her partner, but appeared somewhat listless, even a trifle awkward, when dancing with others. And while he was not dancing Fairfax was scheming to obtain an invitation to the home of the Wilton's.

Agnes, quite unwittingly, gave him the desired opportunity. It was during the interval.

"Mr. Fairfax," she said in an anxious tone, "I have an idea that the dear old lady, Mrs. Monmouth, who must be some sort of a relation of yours, was in distressed circumstances when she parted with that miniature. Would it be possible to find out and allay my anxiety?"

"Of course!" exclaimed Harry Fairfax, jumping at the chance. "And I hope that Mrs. Wilton will permit me to call and report the result of my inquiries."

Mrs. Wilton threw a quick, shrewd glance at her daughter and the young man, and replied in the affirmative.

"We shall be pleased to see you, Mr. Fairfax," she said quietly. "I feel an interest also in the old lady, who, I am half inclined to believe, was distantly related to us, as well as to the Fairfaxes."

Harry bowed, and his heart throbbed with satisfaction.

"I will not fail to make diligent search and to let you know the result," he declared.

Harry Fairfax kept his promise to report; in fact, he "reported" before there was anything of interest to mention. Agnes, however, seemed to think that it was a matter of importance and listened with marked attention. Mrs. Wilton who was not one of those elderly persons who forget their own youthful days, judged it best to leave Fairfax to her daughter for a time, which fact had the effect of prolonging the young man's stay.

Harry Fairfax made three calls within twice as many days, and on each occasion the young people deemed it necessary to minutely examine the miniature together, no doubt in the hope of discovering a clue. On the occasion of the fourth visit, Fairfax was able to announce that he had discovered the whereabouts of the old lady, who was a daughter of the man in the miniature; she was living in very reduced circumstances, having been too proud to apply to the distant members of the family for help. He had made arrangements whereby she would be relieved from anxiety on the ground of obtaining the wherewithal to pass the remaining days of her life in peace.

"I told her," he said to Agnes, when Mrs. Wilton had once more left them alone, "that the miniature had fallen into the hands of one who thought a great deal of it, and——"

He paused. Agnes looking up at him for an explanation of the pause, saw something in his face that made her confused and happy, although she could not define the sentiment.

"Shall I say what I was on the point of saying?" he asked.

"Why should I not? Agnes, it is the first time I have called you by that name. Agnes, I told her that the portrait was in the hands of one whom I hoped would soon become the wife of a man bearing a striking resemblance to the man of the miniature, and having the same name. Was I right in hoping so much? You have bestowed much love on that portrait, can your transfer that love to me and increase it?"

"I think," said Agnes, with a divine blush, "that you may hope, for I feel that it is not the portrait, but you, whom I have loved ever since I have possessed it."

"I do not know what magic influence has been at work—magnetic influence, telepathy or what not," he said a moment later, when he had released her from his strong grasp, "but it appears to me that the attention given by you to my portrait, as I shall call it, had the effect of drawing me to you. I dislike fancy dress balls as a rule, but I was impelled to go to that one by some secret power. I didn't want to go, and yet I did want to go. How was it?"

"I was waiting to see you, expecting that I should meet you somewhere and at some time in the near future, and my desire drew you to me, Harry!" she declared with a mixture of gaiety and gravity. "I am so happy that you have come!"

George Day.

THE FORGED CHEQUE.

A Tale of the Racecourse.

"I TELL you the beast must be pulled!"

The slightly-built man, who looked little more than a lad, fixed a pair of sad, hollow eyes upon the ground between the pointed toes of his boots, and listened to his companion's imperious directions in mute despair.

"It's done every day for much less than this affair means to either you or me," the other urged. "It means beggary to me and prison to you if the beast gets home. If it doesn't, you shall have that unfortunate cheque together with a hundred-pound note the evening following."

"I never pulled a mount yet, Mr. Hall, and I'm hanged if I do now!" the jockey ejaculated through his set teeth.

"It will mean prison for you, then."

"I daresay it will," cried the jockey, in a shrill voice. "You kept that cheque until you knew it was too late for me to prove I didn't forge it, and now you come and threaten me with it unless I do your dirty work. I won't do it, prison or no prison, so I tell you straight. Besides, who told you I'm riding Merrymay?"

"Do you take me for a mole?" said Mr. Hall. "I know you have been asked to ride the beast, and if you refuse or fail to pull him—well, you know how unpleasant will be the consequences."

"I suppose you've got on to The Baker for all you're worth?" Sillings said thoughtfully.

"That's none of your business. The Baker's got to win, that's all you need worry about, and if you pull Merrymay, all will be well."

"For you—yes, I don't doubt it. But what about Lord Shannon? P'r'aps you don't know that he backed my mount for all he's worth, and that Merrymay is relied upon to pay off the mortgage on his estate? A win to The Baker would be absolute ruin to his lordship."

"More fool he! I can't be expected to drop all my money because a friend has backed the horse to win. Now, look here,

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Joe, don't let us have any more words about the matter. Will you or will you not ride and pull?"

"No!"

"Tut! Confound you! What do you think Miss Mastman will say when you're thrown into gaol, and branded a felon? What will she say when she knows that you have been courting her with the crime of a forgery upon your conscience, such a high-minded young woman as she, too?"

"She'd think less bad of me than if I pulled Merrymay," Sillings returned in a hushed voice.

"Well, put it another way. How can you marry her after three or four years in prison? You may not get 'beefy' in gaol, but your skill will be spoilt, your name will be ruined, your career, which at present promises to carry you into the first rank of jockeys, will be cut short. In a word, you will be hopelessly ruined!"

"Surely the Prince of Tempters might come to you for hints!" the jockey hissed. "But even if Merrymay loses, The Baker may not win. He may go all wrong within the next three days. Then where will you be?"

"Fool! I have not backed The Baker; I have laid against Merrymay. If The Baker turns up fit on the course, then I may back him. But that is quite beside the point."

There, apparently, was Joe Sillings' last hope gone. No compromise between him and his tempter was possible. He had to choose between prison and ruin, the loss of the girl he loved and degradation in her eyes, which was perhaps even worse than losing her, and the mere tightening of a rein.

"Which will you do?"

"I'll think it over, and you shall see," the jockey replied weakly.

"Can't you decide now? Think what 'No' means to you."

"Can't you decide in your own mind what I shall do when the time comes?" Sillings replied doggedly.

"Yes, I think I can, Joe," said Mr. Hall, smiling quietly. "You're a wise man, Joe. The *pros* are out of all proportion to the *cons*."

"Have you anything else to say?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then get out of my paddock, Cuthbert Hall."

Mr. Hall knew he had succeeded in his mission, and therefore took this insult with better temper than he would otherwise have done.

He went away without a word, but with a smiling face and a light heart.

Sillings watched him disappear, and groaned.

He was in the hollow of the man's hands, and how could he surrender a successful career, a life's possiblities and a life's love to racecourse ethics? Yet was it merely a question of racecourse ethics? Was it not rather an ephemeral effort which would be reflected by his conscience through all his life; an effort which would ruin many a home, and wreck many a life?

On the other hand, there was no certainty in horse-racing, and those men who had backed, or would back, Merrymay to win, knew they might lose; and if he pulled the horse, and the world knew why, would not his reason justify him before all except those who had lost by this act?

He wandered through his stables, his heart lonely and sick within him, debating with himself which course he should take, and it suddenly occurred to him that if he could discover the whereabouts of his old friend, John Grainger, all would yet be well; John could prove that he never committed the forgery.

But where was John? Perhaps a thousand miles away; perhaps in the very next town. He had not heard anything of him for three years, and knew no one who had. John might be dead. Still, there was hope in this idea. He would endeavour to find John before the day of the race, and if he failed—then he would have to choose.

* * * * *

Late in the evening of the following day Cuthbert Hall was hurrying about his chambers in Sloane Street, preparing everything so far as he could to enable him to get down to Epsom early, without the necessity for rising before his usually late hour.

He was in high feather, flushed, and not absolutely sober. He was looking for the morrow as a day that would see his making, a day of events which would wipe out his financial difficulties and put a handsome fortune in his pocket, and a day, too, which would ruin for ever the chances of his friend, Lord Shannon, redeeming his fortune sufficiently to marry Clair Dudley.

Mr. Hall was not the man to play half the game; he laid a plot to enrich himself and developed it to ruin his rival. He had schemed for months to reach these ends, and he had omitted nothing which could further either object.

He had even forged a note to meet a creditor, whom he could easily have paid, to husband for a day or two a few hundred pounds which he would lay to his own gain. Then he would redeem the note, he decided, and wipe the matter out.

It was all planned to the finest point, and he was naturally elated. It was the honey of satisfaction to him to prepare for the eventful morrow.

At last when all seemed done, he paused and pondered to know if there were nothing else he could do to anticipate the next day. Then he sat down at his writing-table, and took a cash-box from a drawer. Frow the cash-box he extracted a folded cheque.

He satisfied himself that it was the one he wanted, took a sheet of plain note-paper, and, pinning the cheque to it, wrote, "The B. N. follows to-morrow." He folded the two up, slipping them into an envelope which he closed, addressed and stamped.

"He shall have the hundred to-morrow," he said, glancing down at the letter upon the blotting-pad, as he rose and lit a cigarette; "meanwhile I can make four or five of it. I will take this with me, post it at the station on my return to town, and he will see that I am a man who keeps his word in either way."

He smoked the cigarette half through in restless meditation, and then, as if struck by a sudden thought, went out of the room, picked up a hat and stick from the hall rack, and passed out of the building.

He had not been gone three minutes when his man entered the room. His heavy eyes wandered over the room from one object to another until they rested upon the letter.

Picking it up, he read the superscription apathetically, and he glanced at the clock on the mantelshelf.

"Juggins!" he muttered calmly. "I thought he was a bit wavy to-night. Two minutes to twelve. I can just catch it, and if I don't, I suppose I shall catch it—in another way."

Reluctant to cross the muddy road in his indoor shoes, he made a detour to a crossing, and posted the letter at the box opposite the chamber buildings. He returned by way of the crossing, availed himself of the lift and entered the flat just behind his master who had used the staircase.

"Been out, Pink?" Mr. Hall inquired.

"Posted your letter, sir."

"Posted—my—— You blithering idiot!" cried the master, white with fear and rage. "Where did you post it?"

Pink told him, and followed him down the stairs three steps at a time, and across the road.

With fumbling fingers Mr. Hall struck a match and looked at the little enamelled plate, which indicated the time the box would next be cleared.

"Eight-twenty! The box is cleared. Oh, you vast fool!" he cried, turning passionately upon Pink.

He sprang into a hansom and drove to the district sorting office, with all possible haste.

"By mistake a few minutes ago my man posted a letter in the pillar-box at Camden Street corner," he said to an official who came forward. "It is of vital importance that it should not be delivered. It was addressed to Mr. Joseph Sillings, Darcy Lodge, Epsom. The box has been cleared."

"Are you sure it was posted?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I cannot help you; once posted the letter belongs

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to the Postmaster-General until it is delivered at the address of the addressee."

"But I must have it, man!"

"Out of the question, sir."

It was useless to argue; the official was obdurate.

"What time will it be delivered?" Hall asked anxiously.

"Epsom, you say? Between eleven and twelve—about eleven."

And Joe Sillings would not be on the course until one or two o'clock! He would probably get the letter before leaving home. Why, in that case, should he pull Merrymay?

Hall strode out of the office in a frenzy of rage and despair.

Somehow he must draw Sillings away from his house before the letter arrived there, and keep the letter from him till after the race. But how?

"Pink," he said, when he had got back to his chambers, "I want you to send a telegram for me."

"Sillings, Epsom. Meet me at Leatherhead Station eleven sharp, Wednesday. Important. John Grainger," was how he worded the message.

"That will draw him if nothing else will," Hall said, as he affixed a sixpenny stamp.

But even when this was sent off he was uneasy in his mind. He knew Sillings would be at Leatherhead Station at the time appointed, that he would wait anxiously for the appearance of Grainger, and that the chances were a thousand to one against Sillings returning home before the race was run.

But there was the bare chance that the prematurely-posted letter would get to Sillings' hands in some way before Merrymay was paraded, and Hall could do nothing to obviate this contingency.

Next morning, however, refreshed by sleep and no longer muddled by drink, Hall was perfectly sanguine. On his way down to Epsom, he had sent a telegram to Sillings' head groom to ask where his master was, and at Epsom telegraph-office he found awaiting him a reply to the effect that Sillings had gone early to Leatherhead to meet a friend.

This was good news indeed, but opened an ugly doubt for Hall.

Sillings' groom was almost certain to attend the race, and the letter must already have arrived at Darcy Lodge; and might not the groom take it to his master? It was a torturous doubt.

By chance, however, Hall met the groom just outside Epsom station, and satisfied himself that the man had not brought the letter, which had not arrived when Sillings left home, and that no one was coming from Darcy Lodge to the meeting.

Lounging about the paddock some considerable time later, Hall caught sight of Sillings out of the corners of his eyes.

The jockey's face was pale and haggard, and there was a hard, sad look about his mouth.

"What a fool the man is." Hall said to himself. "One would imagine he was required to do murder."

Shortly afterwards Merrymay passed by where Hall was standing. Sillings was up in his purple and white silk.

Instinctively he turned his head, and as he caught sight of Hall, he gave him a look of mute despair. But Hall did not see it.

He was running his eye over The Baker and admiring the horse's wonderful condition, which so impressed him that he moved off and laid every penny he had with him upon the animal.

By the time he had edged himself into a good position for viewing the race, the starters were already off. He could just make out the coloured jackets of the jockeys bobbing along in the distance.

The Baker was third to get off and Merrymay was running in a batch of five of the field behind the first three.

"How-d'ye-do, sir?" said a voice over Hall's shoulder.

Hall turned and blanched as he recognised the sunburnt, chubby face of John Grainger.

He could find no words to speak in his surprise and alarm.

Fate was surely trying to unhinge his mind; first by the hideous mistake about the letter, and now by John Grainger, the vanished man, turned up at such a time. If he had seen Sillings the day was lost, the lifetime ruined!

"I only arrived from South America last night, sir, but seeing my old friend, Joe Sillings, was up on a favourite in the big race, I was bound to come down," Grainger explained.

"Have you seen Sillings?" Hall inquired hoarsely.

"Not to speak to, but I've put a pony on his mount, you may be sure."

Hall turned his head away and shuddered. Fate had played a waiting game with him, he thought, but luck was all on his side.

There, behind him, breathing in his very ear was the one man on earth, who, by a few moments' conversation with Sillings, could have ruined his masterly schemes, and snatched Sillings out of his net; and he had come too late.

Twice in twenty-four hours Hall had been within an ace of ruin, and had been saved by chance.

There was a roar and a pushing forward of the crowds that lined the course, as the horses swerved round the bend and began to come down the straight.

"Marcus!" roared half the crowd. "Harefoot!" yelled the other half, as two horses broke from the leading five and challenged each other.

There was a panting pause, then a roar that made the blood tingle in Hall's flushed cheek.

"The Baker!" shouted the crowd together, as another horse overtook Marcus and Harefoot and showed them his heels.

A moment later a fluttering patch of white and purple seemed to leap forward.

It flashed passed Marcus and Harefoot, and began to overhaul The Baker.

"Merrymay does it! Merrymay!"

Inch by inch Merrymay drew down upon The Baker. The shadow of the favourite's nose flickered on The Baker's thigh, then upon its flank, ribs and shoulders, and then The Baker's nose began to fall back from the level of Merrymay's shoulder to its thigh. when suddenly Merrymay seemed to pick himself up and leap forward a hundred yards—two hundred yards, and Merrymay had won.

* * * * * *

Half an hour later Hall, white, haggard, and aged by many a year, too desperate to hurry from the scene of his ruin without an understanding with Sillings, met the jockey face to face.

Sillings was no less pale and hardly less haggard than Hall, but there was a triumphant light in his face which was naturally wanting in Hall's.

"You blackguard," Hall hissed, half raising his stick.

"You can't honestly call me that," said Sillings quietly. "Not now, at least; I've given all my world to keep faith with Merrymay's backers, and I gave you the chance to hedge. I know what it means to me—ruin, unless I can find John Grainger."

"To hedge?" Hall ejaculated.

"Aye. I sent you a telegram to tell you that Merrymay was not as fit as might be, but if the horse could win he should.

Hall turned and slunk away.

He crept to the station, into a train. He crawled to his chambers by back streets to avoid meeting acquaintances.

Pink greeted him.

"There's a telegram for you, sir," said Pink. "It came a few minutes after you'd gone."

Hall snatched it up and read:

"Merrymay none too fit. But if can win shall—Sillings."

Hall groaned.

At precisely the same moment Sillings at Darcy Lodge was burning a cheque he had found waiting him.

He watched it crumble away in the flames, and smiled up at John Grainger who stood by, watching him.

C. R. L.

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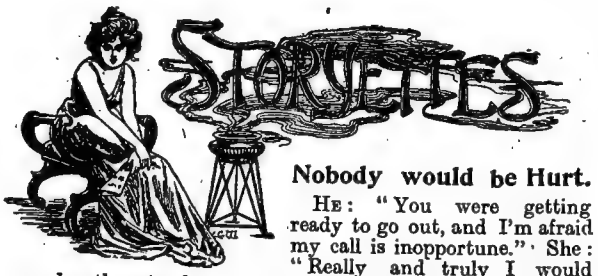

Nobody would be Hurt.

He: "You were getting ready to go out, and I'm afraid my call is inopportune." She: "Really and truly I would much rather stay here and talk with you than keep an engagement this afternoon." "I am delighted. But can the engagement be broken without causing bad feeling?" "Oh, yes. The dentist won't mind."

Not a Private.

Mistress: "Well, I'm sorry you want to leave me, Mary; but what's your reason?" (Mary keeps silent.) Mistress: "Something private?" Mary (suddenly): "No, mum; please, mum, he's a lance-corporal."

Pessemistic.

Miss A.: "The wedding was as sad as a funeral." Mr. Benedict: "Why shouldn't it be? Both have the same result. In one case two are made one; in the other, one is made nothing. One less each time."

The Sort of Work he Wanted.

Applicant: "Please, ma'am, can you help a poor man who is out of work?" Woman: "I think I can find something for you to do." Applicant (gratefully): "Thanks. If you could give me some washing to do I'll take it home to my wife."

A Gentle Hint.

Mr. Spriggins (gently): "My dear, a Kensington man was shot at by a burglar, and his life was saved by a button which the bullet struck." Mrs. Spriggins: "Well, what of it?" Mr. Spriggins (meekly): "Nothing, only the button must have been on."

A Dress Rehearsal.

Harry: "Clara, dearest, you are the only woman I ever really and truly loved." Clara Dearest: "You said that very same thing only last week to May Blossom. She told me so herself." Harry: "True but that was only a dress rehearsal; this is the first performance."

Same Old Story.

Fair Patron: "Look here! You told me a horrid story about the way my husband was acting, and I've found out, on investigation, that it is not true. He's just as good as can be." Fortune Teller: "I've told that same story to about ten thousand different women, and you are the first who has made a complaint."

The Sixpence Gave out.

This is the message the telegraph messenger handed to him: "Come down quickly. I am dying.—Kate." Eight hours later he arrived at the hotel, to be met at the door by Kate herself. "Why—what did you mean by sending me such a message?" he asked. "Oh," she gurgled, "I wanted to say that I was dying to see you, but my twelve words for sixpence ran out, and I had to stop."

Clever Little Wife.

Young Wife: "I knew you would like the slippers, Harry, if for no other reason, because I made them." Husband: "You don't mean this is all your work? Why, what a talented little wife I have, to be sure." Young Wife: "Yes, all my work, of course. I bought the uppers and Mary sewed them together, and I got a man to sole them, but I put the bows on and did them up in the box. And do you know, Harry, I am awfully proud of myself. I didn't think I could ever do such things."

Very Jealous.

"Is Mabel jealous of her husband?" "Jealous? I should think so. Why, on the honeymoon, she wouldn't even let him admire the scenery?"

Not Entire.

Maud: "How could you be so free with Mr. Gable, an entire stranger?" Kate: "He is not an entire stranger. He lost an arm several years ago."

Rather Biassed.

She: "Oh, yes; I quite believe there's a fool in every family. Don't you?" He: "Well—er—my opinion's rather biassed. You see, I'm the only member of the family."

There was a Wedding after all.

Ada (pensively): "I hope you'll invite me to the wedding when you get married." Jack (boldly): "I'll invite you before I ask anyone else, and if you don't accept there wont be any wedding."

He Could Make it go Further.

Husband: "My dear, I wish you would let me carve that fowl. I am sure I could make it go further." Wife: "I know you could. I've seen you send it right off the table, and I wouldn't attempt to make it go further than that."

When Fortune would Smile.

Young Van Marks (in a melancholy tone): "Oh, I suppose I shouldn't brood, but Fortune seems reluctant to smile on me." Harry Gray: "Well, never mind, old fellow, she will when she sees some of your pictures."

A Terrible Loss.

He: "Then I am to understand that you absolutely reject my offer?" She: "There is really nothing else for it." He: "Well, I think it very selfish of you! Here I've actually gone and purchased a guide to Margate for our honeymoon."

Another Angler.

Mrs. Brown: "I had to cook that fish at once as I was afraid it wouldn't keep." Brown: "Great Scott! I'll go straight down to the market and give that man a piece of my mind." Mrs. Brown: "Stop a minute, my dear; it was the fish you caught yourself this afternoon."

Somewhat Muddled.

Linda: "Bella, I'm greatly puzzled over a matter." Bella: "So am I. Tell me your trouble and I'll tell you mine." Linda: "Well, Dick Hardaway told me last night he loved me, but did not ask me to marry him." Bella: "And he asked me to marry him, but didn't say a word about love."

A Matter of English.

Minnie: "Jennie's engagement with the French count is broken off." Mamie: "Good gracious! Why?" Minnie: "You know her hair is so long that it can almost touch the ground when she is standing. He tried to tell one of his friends the fact, and said she had 'hair almost as long as her foot,' and the goose got so mad about it that she won't see him any more."

He was Particular.

Brown: "Why don't you marry and settle down?" Jones: "Well, I've got my reasons for it. The woman I want to marry must have lots of money and be smart, but when I find a woman who has money and who is willing to marry me, her willingness to marry me is positive proof to my mind that she is stupid, and then, of course, she doesn't suit me. I want a smart woman for a wife."

Uncertain as yet.

Lady of the House (to cook, having discovered a policeman in the kitchen): "You told me when you came here that you had no sweetheart." Cook: "Yes, I told you so, and it's the truth, too." "Who, then, is the policeman in the kitchen if he is not your sweetheart?" "He isn't my sweetheart. Indeed he isn't. He is only trying to be, and I don't know whether he will succeed or not."

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Out of Great Tribulation.

By Henry Farmer.

Benny Determines on Treachery.

But we must return to Benny.

The night that had seen his one-time partner artistically burgling the Towers had been one of unrest and torturing anxiety for him. Visions of Esther, of a haggard-faced convict, fettered and wearing the black and yellow dress, had haunted him. He rose from his bed, unrefreshed and leaden-eyed. He scarcely touched his breakfast. As he mechanically opened the newspaper that his landlady brought him, he was looking a very different person from the dapper, comic-faced Mr. Faversham who, at the village concert at Warham, had convulsed his audience with his humorous singing. His conscience seemed to have made a physical as well as a mental wreck of him. He looked an older man altogether.

He was wondering how the Marquis had fared on the previous night, as he glanced down the columns of the paper; but he could expect no news till the evening papers came out. But the Marquis—nothing ever went wrong with him, at least up to the present! Then Benny glanced nervously to right and left, and the paper crackled with the restless movement of his fingers. The next moment a sharp ejaculation burst from his lips, and he struck his forehead with a clenched hand. A paragraph, tucked away in the corner of the paper, had caught his eye.

Alec Scarsdale, well known to the public now as the notorious convict 35, had broken down in health, and had been removed to the infirmary of Wrackam prison, where he was lying seriously ill.

Benny flung the paper from him, sprang to his feet, and paced the room, in an agony of remorse. Presently he was seated at the table, writing at a feverish pace, only to stop abruptly and tear up what he had written. Then he rang the bell, and asked his landlady for a time-table. There was no such thing in the house.

"Masters won't be back till this afternoon or evening," he said to himself. "I must see him first. Wonder how the trains run to Dover to-night. Post a letter after eight o'clock and it wouldn't be delivered till first post to-morrow. If there's a decent train to-night, I should be across the water and well away by then. Or shall I wait till I'm well away before writing? Well, I'll first find out about the trains."

Shortly after, he was on his way to Victoria station. He had risen late. It was one o'clock before he reached his destination.

"I'm altogether chippy," he muttered, making his way on to the platform. "I want a brandy and soda or something of that sort to buck me up."

A train had just run into one of the arrival platforms. A number of passengers were streaming through the barrier gate.

Benny suddenly reeled a little. His lips quivered. All the others passengers seemed to have faded away, all but two—a grey-haired man and the white-faced girl whom he was supporting.

John Mansfield and Esther. The lines had multiplied on the banker's face. His eyes were bent upon his daughter.

"Esther, my darling," he whispered tenderly, "I hope this journey has not been too much for you?"

She smiled up at him bravely. There was no barrier between them now. Crump had swept that away. John Mansfield no longer doubted Alec Scarsdale's innocence. He, too, had suffered. He, too, like Esther, was waiting and hoping. He dared not trust himself to return to Warham, lest he should meet the man whom Crump had unmasked, whom he knew now to be an unutterable scoundrel, the man whom once he had hoped to welcome as his son-in-law.

"No, father, I feel ever so much better than I expected. Of course, I feel a little weak; but one can't expect to get well, quite well, all at once!"

Her eyes and her father's almost simultaneously caught sight of Mr. Faversham. The banker's face flushed red. His free hand clenched up. For a moment he had forgotten the promise of secrecy made to Crump.

"The scound——"

"Father!" whispered Esther, her arm tightening on his. "Remember!"

It was too late for Benny to make believe that he had not seen them. He raised his hat, and would have thanked Heaven had the platform opened and swallowed him up. John Mansfield, with an effort, returned his salutation. Esther bowed.

Benny was only conscious of one thing now—her eyes. The old expression was there, only intensified, more wistful. It stabbed him like a knife. He must do something, say something. She had been ill, lying at death's door, so it had been said. He could not pass by with a mere salutation. If she had only been wearing a veil or something, it would have been easier for him; but those eyes, with their wistful, I-haven't-forgotten-him look in their depths, seemed to fascinate him, draw him towards her.

Why, in God's name, had he ever taken a hand in that foul night's work? He hesitated; then, as if irresistibly drawn, stepped towards Esther and her father. He raised his hat for the second time. Again Esther's arm tightened on her father's.

"I had no idea," he stammered. "I'm so glad to see that you're able—er—to be out and about again, Miss Mansfield. You—er—Mr. Mansfield, must also feel a—er—happy man to-day!"

He was looking everywhere but into Esther's face.

"But I—er—mustn't keep you. Only I'm glad—er—more glad than I can ever tell you to have seen you again, Miss Mansfield; to know that you—you—well, that you're better. I'm going abroad for a bit. Perhaps, it may be some time before I see you again. Good-bye, Mr. Mansfield. Good-bye, Miss Mansfield. Never forget how good you were to me when I came that cropper. Excuse me; but I'm not quite myself to-day. Worries, business worries. And I'm keeping you. Good-bye!"

There had been no shaking of hands. He had spoken after the fashion of a man who was desperately pressed for time, giving those to whom he was talking no chance of getting a word in edge-ways. With a jerky, nervous salutation, he hurried away abruptly. When, a few moments later, he entered the refreshment buffet, his limbs were shaking, and tiny beads of perspiration were standing out on his forehead.

He was in the act of gulping down some brandy, when the door swung back, and a man sauntered up to the counter, and ordered some refreshment.

"The scoundrel!" breathed out John Mansfield, after Benny's abrupt departure.

"But I'm so thankful," whispered Esther, "that you didn't betray yourself. And, father, he talks of going abroad! Mr. Crump ought to know this. Would you send him a telegram now!"

And when the banker had seen Esther safely into a cab, he dispatched a telegram to "Penworthy." But it was superfluous.

It was Grogan who had entered the refreshment buffet. When Benny, who tried to steady his nerves with more drink,

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left, he had made up his mind. That glimpse of Esther had given him strength. The die was cast.

He intended to betray the Marquis!

A train left for Dieppe at ten o'clock that night. He returned to his rooms. The evening paper contained no account of any robbery at Warham. Had the Marquis changed his plans at the last moment? Shortly after dusk, Benny left his lodgings for Chancery Lane.

"Mr. Masters returned yet?" he inquired of the office boy.

"No, sir. I have had a telegram from him, saying that he has been unexpectedly detained, and won't be back to-night; but he'll be here for certain first thing to-morrow morning!"

Benny rapped out an oath under his breath. The sooner he was out of the country, and the load, that pressed so heavily, off his conscience, the better! Should he wait till the morrow, or leave that night, and trust to chance for some future opportunity of changing the diamonds into cash? He had sufficient money in hand for immediate purposes. Wavering in his mind, he returned to his lodgings. A later edition of the evening paper contained no news of any jewel robbery.

Shortly after his return, Benny was writing again, and tearing up. Sometimes the doomed letter commenced "To Miss Mansfield." Sometimes "To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

"Oh, God! How Long?"

"I SHALL not be back to-night, Railton. I shall put up at the Hotel Royal."

"Very good, sir!"

Railton opened the front door for his master. A brougham was drawn up outside the Firs. Revelle, a cigar between his teeth, portmanteau in hand, entered it.

"Good evening to you, sir!" said Railton, with a respectful obeisance.

"Good night, Railton."

As the broughan rattled away stationwards, Revelle leant back, and laughed. The Normanhurst jewels were in his portmanteau; at what time they were presumably supposed to be lying, snug and secure, in the safe at the Towers. The irony of the situation tickled his sense of humour.

"'Pon my soul!" he muttered. "They'll probably be off my hands and across the water before they're missed. A record, I think!" He laughed again. Then the handsome face hardened a little. "And when I've done my business with Masters I'll give Benny a look up. I think he'll probably be deuced sorry now that he showed the white feather, and backed out of the business."

At the station a porter sprang to his brougham, and opened the door. Revelle did not, however, intrust him with the carrying of his bag. He sauntered on to the platform. It was growing dark, but the station lamps had not yet been lighted. A few moments after a man passed on to the platform—the artist who had been sketching the Firs. He took no notice of two other men already on the platform, seated apart in quiet corners. Nor had Revelle noticed them. When the train arrived he entered a first class carriage. The three men entered the same third class compartment.

"Gentlemen," said Crump, when the train was in motion, "I am experiencing a feeling of excitement such as I have not known for years. Our plan of campaign is perfectly clear to all of us, is it not?"

"Quite!"

"He is an unutterable scoundrel; but it has been a most remarkable and masterly performance on his part. I have postponed interviewing Rumbey till to-morrow. I trust to be at leisure then."

London reached, Revelle sprang into a hansom, bidding the man drive to Chancery Lane. A couple of hansoms followed. Shortly after Revelle had entered the block of buildings in Chancery Lane where Lewis Masters rented chambers, three men sauntered up. A fourth man joined them.

"Masters," he said, "isn't in. He's not returning till to-morrow morning."

"Gentlemen," whispered Crump, "this is disappointing.

Some Big Eaters.

Many men who have made their way in life have been big eaters. Premier Seddon and Pierpont Morgan are names which immediately occur to the mind; while it is a well-known fact that the great Napoleon died from a disease brought on by eating too freely of his favourite dish—stewed onions. Eating means, or should mean, the intaking of energy. While this was the case with Napoleon, he was great. When his digestion gave out, he became weak, ill, and at last succumbed. Every worker, man or woman, should know that the appetite is the index to the health. Can you eat? Can you store up energy? If not you should not work and expend it. Is your digestion sound? If not, look to it. If it is weak and disordered, it is a screw loose in the great machine which continues your existence, and if it once becomes lost, it can never be replaced. Fortunately, nature has provided a remedy for all digestive ailments. Chas. Forde's Bile Beans when taken, assume in the body the exact form of nature's own bile. They aid digestion, clear the bowels of accumulated impurities and fermenting food, and stimulate the liver in the only way which nature has said this shall be done. Don't take mineral medicines, but take nature's own vegetable cures. Nature makes your ailments, let nature cure them. Bile Beans being purely vegetable are nature's own remedy. You get them from any chemist at one and three half-pence a box. Economical buyers get a two and nine-penny box which contains three times the quantity of the smaller box at a little over twice the price.

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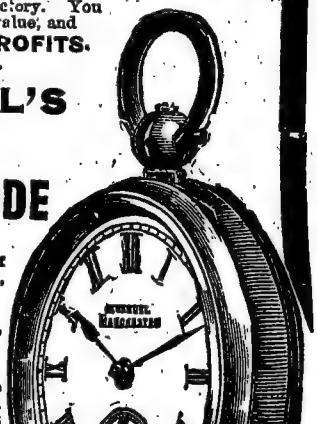

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H. SAMUEL (Dept. 29) Market Street, MANCHESTER.

Let us move a little way from the entrance. We shall be having Mr. Revelle back in a moment."

He was right. A moment later Revelle emerged, and hailed a passing hansom.

"The Hotel Royal!" he cried to the driver.

The words reached Crump. Hotel Royal? Esther Mansfield was staying there with her father. Crump's lips tightened up. Was it coincidence, or intentional?

When he reached the hotel Revelle engaged a bed-room; then asked to see the manager.

"I've one or two important papers and things in my bag," he said to the manager, "I should be obliged to you if you'd lock it up in your strong-room, and give me a receipt for it."

"With pleasure, sir."

This having been done, Revelle obtained the key of his bed-room and ascended by the lift.

"And now," he muttered, on reaching his room, "a wash and a brush-up, and then Benny! A confounded nuisance, Masters being away; but to-morrow will do, and the stuff's safe where it is!"

When he left the room and passed out into the corridor, the lift-boy was in the act of pulling the trellis gate.

"Wait a second! I'm coming down!"

The boy flung back the gate, Revelle stepped in; then, catching sight of a seated, girlish figure, started in spite of his admirable self-control.

Esther Mansfield!

She had glanced up as he had entered. Their eyes met.

The gate crashed to. The lift was descending. He had not seen her since that day when, on the brow of the cliff, he had held her unconscious in his arms, had pressed a burning kiss to her cold lips. For all his self-control the hot blood surged to his face.

"Miss Mansfield!"

He held out his hand. She rose to her feet, took it mechanically.

"I have never thanked you," she whispered, speaking after the manner of someone repeating a lesson, "for what you did at Gurlston Bay!"

"Ah!" he said, hoarsely, quickly, "don't speak of that. Any man would have done what I did. But you are better? Tell me that you are better?"

"I'm much better!"

But she could not trust herself to look at him. Yet she must play her part! The lift stopped. The boy flung open the gate. Esther moved away.

"You are staying here?" questioned Revelle quickly.

"Yes!"

"May I hope to see you to-morrow?"

"I don't quite know what my father's movements will be. Good-night, Mr. Revelle!"

She passed out into the corridor, never glancing at him, and hurried away to her room. Once within, she clasped her forehead with her thin, transparent hands.

"Oh, God!" she whispered, "how long, how long?"

A moment later there was a tap on the door. The chamber-maid handed her a note—a slip of paper that had evidently been torn out of a note-book for want of more suitable material. The address was in pencil, and had evidently been written hastily. The handwriting was familiar. Esther feverishly untwisted the paper.

"In great haste I scrawl this. Mr. Revelle is staying at this hotel. I trust you will be spared the pain of meeting him. The end is looking very much nearer now. Courage, my dear young lady. Circumstances prevent me from seeing you now. To-morrow, perhaps.—PENWORTHY."

It had come too late to save her the pain of meeting the man she loathed beyond all expression; but not too late to cheer.

That scribbled note almost seemed an answer to her passioned cry of a few seconds before: "Oh, God! how long, how long?"

Revelle quitted the lift on the ground-floor. He was fiercely biting his lips. The game was up where Esther Mansfield was concerned, and a great bitterness was rankling in his soul. And she had seemed to him more beautiful than ever. Never had he desired her more! All his scheming, all his villainy had ended in nothing. She loathed him, saw through him, and he knew it now. He left the hotel and sprang into a hansom, his destination the quiet rooms in the north of London where Benny was staying.

Crump and Inspector Winton followed in another hansom.

The Shadows on the Blind.

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

Having thus topped a sheet of paper, Benny laid aside his pen, and, springing to his feet, proceeded to pace the room nervously. The slamming to of a door in the house caused him to start violently.

"Yes, I won't wait for Masters. I'll get across to-night; post the letters from the other side; but I may as well get them written now."

He drew a small revolver from his pocket, then returned it.

"I've got the jumps to-night. Have a sort of feeling, somehow, that perhaps the Marquis will be turning up. I was a fool to give him my address. And yet if he does turn up—but why should he? No, I've got the jumps, that's what's the matter with me!"

He sat himself down at the table again, and had covered a sheet of paper with writing before the old restlessness seized upon him again. He read through what he had written.

"Yes, that seems pretty clear, as far as it goes!"

He placed the sheet under the blotting paper, and began a fresh page. It was all but covered, when a sharp knocking on the front door produced another violent start.

Quickly he thrust the paper under the blotting-paper; then sat listening with straining ears.

"In here?"

It was the Marquis' voice. The next moment the door opened.

"Hallo, old chap, taken you by surprise, eh? 'Pon my soul!"—Revelle closed the door behind him—"you don't look very glad to see me, Benny!"

He laughed languidly, and held out his hand.

Benny sprang up. As he did so, his cuff caught the blotting-paper and shifted its position slightly.

"Oh, but I am, Marquis—ever so glad; but you've taken me by surprise—I wasn't expecting you—but sit down, old chap. I'm dying to hear about things! You needn't be afraid to talk out here. My landlady's the only person in, and she's as deaf as a post. Sit down. No fizz on the premises; but whisky, brandy. Have a drink! Have you pulled it off? There's been nothing in the papers!"

"Yes!" drawled Revelle, sinking into the chair that Benny had vacated, and resting one elbow on the blotting paper. "Not a hitch. You were a fool, Benny, not to stand in with me!"

Outside, two men were watching the blinded window, and a shadow upon it.

"I would give a great deal," whispered Crump, "to be able to hear the conversation."

"No, Marquis, I wasn't. I was best out of it. I congratulate you. You deserved to succeed; but I was better out of it. Same time, it hasn't made any difference to our friendship, has it?" Benny seemed very restless. "And, Marquis, don't stick on that chair. Take—take this easy chair. You'll—you'll find it more comfortable. Do, old chap, and let me mix you a brandy and soda! Of course I don't live up to 'The Firs' style; but, come over here, and make yourself comfortable!"

"No, thank you, Benny. I'm all right here. Of course, dear old chap, your standing out hasn't interfered with our friendship in the least!"

Then suddenly his dark eyes dilated.

A piece of paper sticking out from under the blotting paper on which his elbow rested, had arrested his attention.

He could just see the words—

"To the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard."

(Developments regarding Benny's letter are recorded next week.)

A Plain Talk about Catarrh.

In a late number of an Ear, Nose and Throat Journal the Editor devotes a considerable space to a very clear description of the different forms of catarrh, and of a treatment which is curing cases where other methods have failed. A large number of these cases are described so plainly as to give every hope of a cure to those who have suffered for years, especially as the new treatment can be followed at home. For deaf people there is also a report upon the successful treatment of defective hearing by external application, with a summary of some really remarkable cases cured even after operations have been performed. For the benefit of those who are interested it is announced that a free copy of the "Journal" can be obtained by addressing the Editor, 72 Regent's Park Road, London, N.W. With the Journal a special "Supplement" will be enclosed, which gives details of upwards of forty cases cured by the new Method during the past month, also a Report Form by means of which anyone can obtain full particulars and free advice as to the use of the treatment in their own case.

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By Madge Morris.

[*I shall be glad to answer, to the best of my ability, any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to me personally, c/o the Editor of* SHORT STORIES.]

Is Deformity a Bar to Marriage?

SHOULD a deformity be allowed to interfere with marriage? This question often crops up in various forms in my correspondence, and I may say that all must depend on the depth of the affection of the parties. "ERIC" was engaged to Ethel, "the best girl in the world," but some time ago she lost her left hand. Now she thinks she ought not to marry "ERIC" because her opinion is that a woman thus disabled could not make a good wife and housekeeper.

* * * *

In "ERIC'S" case, I see no reason for any cessation of the engagement. The loss of a hand is perhaps one of the least serious results of an accident, as, in course of time, one can learn to use the other hand with almost the same effect as two. So, "ERIC," tell Ethel from me that I think she is misjudged in overrating her misfortune, and should not allow it to disturb the happiness of you both.

The Law Regarding Presents.

CAN "W. H." claim presents from a girl to whom he was engaged, but who has since broken the match off? Some of the presents were very expensive, and the girl, after offering to return them, now refuses to do so. "W. H." asks if he can recover them by law.

* * * *

Certainly not, "W. H." A present is a present all the world over, and law cannot possibly compel her to return them. At the same time, I think a girl with any pride or decency, knowing that a man has asked for his presents back, could not hesitate for a moment about returning them. But the matter must be left to her, and no gentleman should have the bad taste to press for the return of presents if the other party shows no disposition to return them. What has been given, "W. H.," has been given.

The Best Age to Fall in Love.

THANK you very much, "ETHEL W.," for your kind congratulations. What is the proper age for a girl to have a young man? Well, I don't know that propriety enters much into the question. Everything depends on when the young man comes along. Some girls are predisposed to receive attentions at seventeen, others not before twenty, or seventy.

* * * *

I think the best judge of your own susceptibility will be the young man, and when he comes along don't bother much about the age. At the same time, I am not referring to the age at which one should think about marriage. That must depend on a host of other things, such as your own mental and physical fitness, and the position of the young man—quite another question.

Don't Give Him Up.

"TROUBLED ONE," if your sweetheart really loves you, as he evidently does, seeing that he has revealed to you what he has about his past life, I think you should not allow the circumstance you mention from standing in your way. There are very few single men who have led spotless lives, and the fact that your lover's experiences in a previous love affair have brought him trouble does not make him any the worse than thousands of more fortunate fellow men. Take it philosophically, "TROUBLED ONE," and look to the future, not to the past.

The Mother to Blame

"DESPERATE" is in love with a young lady who returned his affections. Her mother has been notified of the fact, and since then the young lady has been very cold towards "DESPERATE," but still accepts gifts from him.

* * * *

I should imagine the mother has not received "DESPERATE'S" suit for her daughter with very much enthusiasm. She might almost have forbidden her daughter to allow matters to go too far. The girl's coldness is possibly caused by her anxiety and worry over the matter. "DESPERATE" had better see the mother himself and make a clean breast of his own feelings, and find out the true state of affairs.

Etiquette when Out with a Lady.

"S. S. S." wishes to know three things: Firstly, on which side of a lady he should keep when cycling with her; secondly, on which side when walking with her; and thirdly, how he should introduce the lady to a gentleman.

* * * *

When cycling with her, of course ride on the outer side, so as to place yourself between her and any vehicle that may be passing. The same rule applies in the case of walking; where there is no footpath always give the lady the inner side of the road. Lastly you do not introduce a lady to a gentleman at all. If you are out with a lady and meet a gentleman friend, introduce the latter to the lady saying "May I introduce Mr. Blank?" adding, as you indicate the lady, "Miss Dash." This rule obtains in all ranks of Society, where the gentleman, no matter what his social standing, must be presented to the lady.

Romance of a Photograph.

"DOLLIE" has been impressed with a young man, whom, she says, she has never met. The whole affair arose through her constantly seeing his photograph in a friend's house, and hearing accounts of his character which have so attracted her that she feels herself madly in love with him. How can I advise one who is in love with a man she has never seen?

* * * *

I think it is a form of attachment likely to lead to disappointment. No doubt "DOLLY" attributes to him all sorts of qualities he does not possess at all, and when the meeting does take place he will probably strike her as a different being from the ideal of the photograph frame. I once knew a girl who had taken a great fancy to the likeness of the brother of a friend of hers. The friend worshipped her brother and had told my acquaintance all sorts of beautiful things about him. Consequently she began to fall in love with him herself.

* * * *

One day it was announced that he was to visit his sister, and my friend was astounded to see, not a tall, broad, handsome man enter, but a small youth of only moderate attractiveness. His conversation was the very opposite to what she had hoped and expected, and before the meeting was over she was disappointed to the verge of despair. In "DOLLY'S" case there is no harm in falling in love with a photograph, but she should be careful of building too great hopes on its likeness to the original.

Correspondents, Please Note.

WILL "SINCERE," who wrote to me some months ago about the question of educating his *fiancée*, kindly forward his address, as I have a communication from another correspondent to forward him which is likely to be of interest to him regarding the information he is seeking.

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